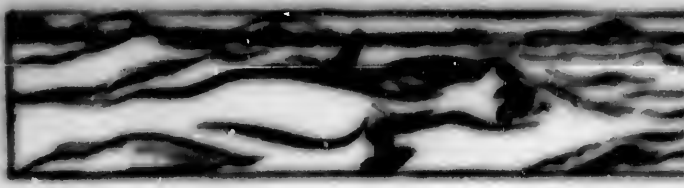
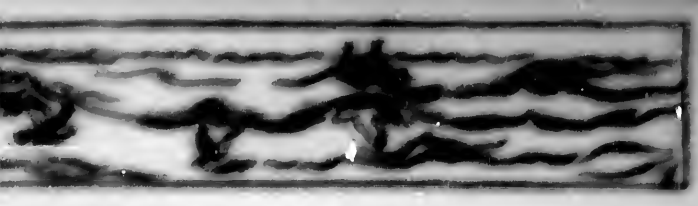


Where are the "Ends of the Empire"? and which are the Over-Seas? At "the Ends" of one may arise the beginnings of other Empires to come. It is notorious that wherever an English-speaking community settles and opens up new lands, it speedily speaks for itself as a Centre; and so rapid is the growth of the great Colonies, that Ministers to-day writing despatches to Dependencies over-seas, receive their answers from nations to-morrow.

But great as is the growth of the Empire and the enterprise of its peoples, the new native-born literatures take years to germinate and generations to arrive. Thence comes it that often we do not understand the atmospheres of the new English-speaking peoples, and often misunderstand the problems, the ambitions, the attitudes, befitting them as new races. And while the British Empire grows richer daily in patriotic fervours, in speeches, in splendour, in cant, and in the oracular assurances of Statesmen, the English people seeks to understand its cousins by the interchange of cablegrams, by debates, and by all the ambiguities of official memoranda.

It is, however, the artist's work to bring the people of his nation and their atmosphere before the eyes of another. It is the artist alone, great or small, who, by revealing and interpreting the life around him, makes it living to the rest of the world. And the artist is generally absent! In the case of the English in India, ten years ago, while the literature of information was plentiful, the artist was absent; Mr. Kipling arrived and discovered modern India to



the English imagination. And to-day, in the midst of a general movement for Empire expansion, with talk of Federation, Jingoism, and with the doing of real work, the artists in literature are generally absent, the artists who should reveal the tendencies, the hidden strength and weakness, the capacities of the new communities.

The aim of "The Over-Seas Library" is purely experimental. It proposes to print literature from any quarter that deals with the actual life of the English outside England, whether of Colonial life or the life of English emigrants, travellers, traders, officers, over-seas, among foreign and native races, black or white. Pictures of life in the American States will not necessarily be excluded.

"The Over-Seas Library" makes no pretence at Imperial drum-beating, or putting English before Colonial opinion. It aims, instead, at getting the atmosphere and outlook of the new peoples recorded, if such is possible. It aims at being an Interchange between all parts of the Empire without favour, an Interchange of records of the life of the English-speaking peoples, and of the Englishmen beyond seas, however imperfect, fragmentary and modest such records or accounts may be.

The Editor will be glad to receive any MSS. addressed to him, c/o the Publisher.

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HAROLD BINDLOSS

A WIDE DOMINION

LONDON
T. FISHER UNWIN
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INTRODUCTION

AS it was with their forbears in the old days when the keels of the Northmen first grounded on British sand, so there is still hidden in the heart of the English race a somewhat egotistical belief that their special business is to subdue and set in order the waste places of the earth. Weighed down by this responsibility the Englishman abroad, especially of the tourist species, occasionally makes himself ridiculous by interference in matters he does not understand, while downwards through the centuries Governor and Statesman have made disastrous blunders whose effects other centuries will be required to efface.

But in spite of failings the best of the Anglo-Saxons have gone far with their task, for now the rank and file at least are producers rather than plunderers, who cover the great waste prairie with leagues of yellow

wheat, or with infinite, patient labour clear the forests away. Few of these heap up money to carry back with them, but they build new homes in the wilderness, drive tunnels, hew trails, lay railroads, and so make ready a wide land for those who come after them. Thus it happens that as the mother country grows overcrowded and, it may be, overcivilised, when in the swarming, smoke-blackened towns the many go badly fed, or, crushed down by surroundings, sink into an automaton resemblance to the machines they tend, new lands across the ocean are waiting where they may walk erect in clean sunlight, win with healthful labour a sustenance out of the kindly earth, and through their children impart fresh vigour to the race. So the strength of England overseas would seem to be that in many of her colonies the poor may gain all that man is entitled to by toil which, if arduous, carries no degradation with it, and instead of grinding down soul and body to a mechanical sameness leaves the toiler an independent individual with a responsibility of his own.

Now the writer is quite aware that all this has been set forth much better before, and that in by-gone ages the Hebrew prophets pointed out to an arrogant nation that the State grows rotten when scantiness falls to the many and profusion to the few. Still, having seen them engaged in it, he ventures to point out again the business of the real colonists. Some take up the task because the love of free air and space is born in them, and others perhaps because through the fevered restlessness which first impels them they dimly recognise it is their mission. So, in spite of rampant commercialism, and what the author of "Alton Locke" calls the devil's cry of getting on in the world, there are many British—highly trained official and nameless adventurer—who, though often blindly, suffer manifold evils and occasionally perish for the good of the race alone, all the way from the deadly steam of the tropics to the snowfields of the north, neither seeking nor receiving any rich reward. And in various regions the writer has watched these, the true Empire builders, at their work, as well as the spurious kind—

the fortune-makers. The work of the latter is mostly evil—cities whose sole industry is mining-share gambling, where the vile of every nation are gathered together, and half-naked native harlots sit openly in the streets. These are the modern prototypes of Sodom and Gomorrah, as Judas Iscariot was, in the old days, of the land-jobber; but one cannot fully appreciate the genius of the latter without having seen him swindle half a lifetime's savings from some unfortunate settler.

So with hesitation, and leaving the moral of it henceforward to be dealt with by abler hands, the writer would attempt to show how the rank and file live and work in that wide Dominion which stretches westwards from Labrador to the blue Pacific, because having dwelt a space with them he knows the conditions under which it is done. Also in threading these few reminiscences together the personal element is merely used to introduce the real story of others, while the experience of any three or four individuals is only of interest when it is that of thousands more. Further, and with due deference to better-known delineators, he

would try to show that he found them neither roving swashbucklers nor eccentric ruffians, but a sturdy, sober, law-abiding people, engaged in a grim struggle with natural difficulties. They are also a loyal people, and, omitting the habitants of Quebec, and the colonial-born Scotchmen of Ontario who cleared the way for them, essentially English, with a due respect for all that is good in established custom and tradition. As a result, in their land one may search in vain for the vagaries of a democracy run to seed and blind irreverence of everything which are too glaringly prominent in certain other colonies.

Thus, in kindly memory of those who shared with him the rain-soaked blanket, and gave him freely of their last provisions; of comrades who went further than the rude apprenticeship, and are even now hewing trails which will presently grow into great roads through the redwood forest; and of others whose work is over and sleep undisturbed by the passing of a white man's foot in the stillness of the bush, he ventures to commence a halting narrative.

HAROLD BINDLOSS.

A WIDE DOMINION

CHAPTER I

THE WESTERN OCEAN

IT was a nipping day of spring when the old *Afghan* hauled out from her wharf at Liverpool, bound with emigrants to Canada. A feathery jet of vapour roared aloft from her escape-pipe, forming a blur of incandescent whiteness against the blue above ; the winches whirred their hardest, but their clanging was lost in a clamour of voices. Every foot of the long flush deck seemed packed with humanity, piles of quaintly assorted baggage cumbered the hatchways, and the crew stumbled helplessly through the mixed-up chaos.

The throng were men of many nations and

different modes of speech, but mostly the poor and downtrodden, who, tired of a hopeless struggle in the closely packed older world, were going forth in search of a wider field in the new. And gazing at them one could not help the thought that the older countries were driving out their best, for the virtue of long endurance sometimes sinks into apathetic slothfulness, and these were the bolder spirits who, leaving all behind them, were ready to venture into the unknown. They had answered the first part of Hamlet's question with a resolute negative. Nor, although we looked for it, could we see the cast-off and irreclaimable section in evidence. Life in a new land means labour, so the latter usually stay at home.

Of course there were many British, for it is the destiny of part of the Anglo-Saxon race to suffer many evils and too often perish opening a way for future generations into the waste places of the earth. These were chiefly young lads who had not yet learned that life is a serious business, and looked forward to sport and adventure in the Dominion. We stood by and watched them with mingled ap-

proval and pity, for there is something in the departure of an emigrant ship which curiously stirs the heart. So they swarmed about us, burly, tow-haired Prussians in black leather jackets, also their hereditary enemies from the channel shores of France, tall and sinewy giants who spoke the Swedish tongue, and men with swarthy faces from the coasts of the Mediterranean.

Exactly what brought two of the party there was our own business, but we were bound out with the others in search at least of experience in the wider spaces of the West. Differing from many, we had a shrewd suspicion we would not find fortune there, and in due time we got the experience. Tom had been plucked for colour-blindness on his final examination for a captain's certificate, and I with the wanderer's spirit found the cramped life at home grew tame. This, of course, was lunacy, as candid friends had said, but destiny is stronger than environment, and I went out, as I partly recognised, because I could not help it. Tom had learned much at sea, and I a little in erratic ramblings and the harder kinds of

sport, chiefly that connected with salt water, and possessing some aptitude for manual labour we were going, so we trusted, to grow wheat upon the prairie.

Presently a vibrating boom of the whistle rang overhead, the propeller began to throb, and a storm of voices broke out along the crowded deck. Others answered from the pier, but that farewell had something of a sob. There were smiles and tears from the women, another greeting went back down the screw-tossed wake, and the last link had been broken between us and all we loved at home. I caught sight of a little handkerchief waved apart from the rest, raised my hat once more, and then resolutely turned my eyes to sea. The old life was fading, and every stroke of the engines carried us so much nearer the new. Also I remember Tom said huskily, "Five years I fought my way in foreign-manned sailing ships, five more in short-handed cargo tramps—and then the Board of Trade took my bread away. Well, there are other lands than England, and perhaps better luck elsewhere. I wonder of all this company how many will come back again?"

I understood what brought the tremor into his voice, for though she had been as a step-mother to us we loved the old country, and we knew it then. Still, it was a glorious afternoon, clear and keen and cold, a cloudless sky above us and a turquoise sea below, and our spirits rose as we watched the tall spars swaying lazily across the blue. The love of the sea was in us, as after much undergone upon it it is in the writer still. So we rolled out past the red-painted lightships which mark the devious channel through leagues of fretted sand, out into the glow of crimson that flamed in the north and west, while when this faded a bright flash trembled across the white-streaked tides beneath the Calf of Man. There was little sleep that night, and less order. The ship resembled a babel, for men debated in diverse tongues about their possessions, or fought for coveted berths, at least among the emigrants with whom we have to do. In spite of fantastic garments and unwashen faces these were more interesting than the saloon passengers, for they had not the mask of polish, and the real, raw human nature was made clearly manifest.

Early next morning we forged through the Sound of Rathlin against the east-bound tide, and the *Afghan* whirled the spray aloft as she rolled in stately measure along the wild Irish coast. Next she touched at Moville to embark a further contingent of Donegal peasants, and above the cracking of car-whips and the howls of the Jehus there rang the old erse keen. Then after the roar of the parting whistle she turned her bows to the north, and trembling to the engines' stroke lurched past the crags of Malin out into the Atlantic. By this time the passengers had partly settled down, and it was just as well, for the old *Afghan* had two thousand tons of steel in her lower hold for the Canadian Pacific track, so she reeled like a pendulum with every lift of the sea, down from one rail to the other with a vicious jerk which tried the surest feet. Being naturally inquisitive, for which we suffered, we descended when night came into the bottomless pit of the steerage. Now matters are ordered better in the regular passenger boats, but though that was but a few years ago things were different, and I remember it was blowing hard when we

gained the head of the ladder. A nauseous, musky odour came up from below, and I shuddered a little, while Tom laughed softly.

'Nothing!" he said. "This is the fragrance of Araby to what you'd find in a coloured labour ship stewing under the line, with one pint of condensed water to each man a day, and cholera and dysentery let loose among them."

I afterwards learned his words were true, but that was bad enough for the present, and soon clutching a stanchion we stood on the orlop deck, which sloped away beneath us towards the vertical, just as a clattering avalanche swept past. There were tin cups and basins, bent plates and hoop-iron knives, bundles, wooden boxes, an overturned child or two, divers seasick Teutons, and a substratum of filth, and it all brought up together amid guttural profanity in the lower side. A woman in draggled garments sat wedged in with three children among some boxes, wailing heart-rendingly. The tier of up-heaved berths emptied part of their contents, human and otherwise, and then we sprang for the second

ladder before the *débris* rolled back. Down on the deck below the smells were even worse. A line of swinging-lamps diffused a sickly glow, and here prone forms lay littered everywhere, while with heels braced against the timber of berths like cattle-pens a group of Norwegian fishermen were contentedly playing some game of chance. Then amid dirt, confusion, and temporary despair, we found two men who had served her Majesty upon the sea engaged in a forlorn hope of instituting order. One, as we afterwards learned, had not been a petty officer; the other had, and we noticed the instinct was still upon him, for he called his companion "Sir."

Now three different sets of gutter-urchins travelled in that ship, sent out by organised charity to make a fresh start in a happier country. Two were cared for, in some degree, but the third was not, and we found some fifty wretched lads whose food and blankets had been stolen, huddled, half-frightened, half-seasick, behind a partition. Ex-leading-gunner Robson, or whatever his rank had been, was busy collecting the

clanging tins, and making attempts at intervals to restore the sickest to their berths.

"What is it you are blubbering for?" we heard him say to one, and the answer was to the point, "Nothink to eat all day, sir, an' them foreigners took all my things away. But please look at Charlie here; he upset down the ladder and split his forehead."

He had, for the next we turned to wore a grimy, crusted handkerchief round his head. His hair was clotted, and great smears of half-dried crimson covered his jacket. Then the other naval officer used words which should have cost him five shillings, for though he had descended in the social scale he fulfilled one requirement for that penalty. After this he turned to us and said, "I don't know who you are, and I haven't a card of my own, but if you're willing to help me there is plenty you can do. First we'll interview the steward, and then the doctor."

When we found him the former blustered, but his interrogator had not lost the art of commanding men, so he concluded apologetically, "What can we do with this crowd,

sir, with our small complement? I daren't wake the chief doctor for a steerage passenger, and the assistant won't come here when he's busy with rich women in the saloon."

Then our new friend broke out, "By the Lord he shall, if I have to bring him by the neck!" and presently we returned with the overworked stripling who wore the crimson braid. For half an hour we laboured, and then having comforted the urchins somewhat, climbed back on deck, the writer devoutly thankful to be once more under the windy vault of indigo and to breathe the clean freshness of the white-ridged ocean. That was but the beginning of a continued friendship, and when Mellard—the rank is omitted—passed out of our lives he left behind him the memory of a man with many weaknesses but a kindly heart.

Two days later the strong breeze died, and for several that followed, shouldering apart the long undulations with a drowsy roar at the bows and beating them into lines of white by the thudding screw astern, the steamer lurched on to the westwards, a tiny strip of blackness

in the centre of a great azure circle, the dingy trail from her funnel blurring the cerulean sea. Also, at seven each morning, Mellard and Robson marched their lads on deck, saw them well sluiced with wholesome brine because other water was scarce, and then with sand begged from the bos'n made them scour their cups and dishes into the likeness of burnished silver. Afterwards they were marched to the steward's pantry, where each received his due share, while when breakfast was over berths and floor were scrubbed down. So the little outcasts travelled in sweetness and comfort, and grew ruddier with every day of the pure ocean air, while Mellard, who had doubtless done evil, did a good work then. Meanwhile, their proper guardian, a clean-shaved, æsthetic curate, displayed himself daily upon the saloon-deck, where he probably found it his business to see to the spiritual welfare of the young lady passengers, who—and he was a handsome man—clustered about him, and listened worshipping. Still, there was reason in Tom's blunt summing, "Some day, if his own tale is true, when that fellow's log is overhauled it won't be a gilt

halo he'll get as his reward;" but, as he added, this was not our business.

It was about that time a serious disturbance troubled the peace of the ship. Now the Briton, as a matter of course, looks down upon all foreigners, and most of the former nationality considered it degrading to live with men who did not know their speech. For this they had some reason, because those of Southern extraction had trying ideas on the subject of personal cleanliness. So one day the captain was summoned in a hurry, and following in his wake we found a very respectable battle going on in the orlop deck. Amid howls in many languages men strove to stab each other with doubled-up soft knives, banged their enemies' faces with dinged-in tin plates, or rolled over and over among the trampling feet. Boots, basins, little loaves saved from a previous meal, and other sundries were hurtling in the air, and presently we discovered that the British community were trying to drive the others on to the deck below.

"Four hundred of them at it from all appearance!" said the skipper serenely. "They usually get up a circus like this, and when it's

over the damages are very few. That's one reason why we insist upon the slop-shop knives. I couldn't stop them with treble my crew, and it's best to leave them to settle the matter their own way. Once the weaker lot give in we'll have quietness."

The matter was shortly settled, and the skipper proved right, for by twos and threes the dirtier portion of the emigrants were dragged to the ladder and dropped through with little ceremony on to the deck below, while when the fray was over a party of Britons and Scandinavians with blackened eyes and dishevelled hair commenced quietly straightening up.

Next we met the dismal fog which broods almost eternally over the banks of Newfoundland, and with the whistle booming blundered half-speed by the telegraph, but faster by the screw, through the thick of the fishing fleet. Each time the haze thinned a little there were glimpses of swaying spars, while barque and ketch and schooner plunging catheads under at their anchors flitted endlessly by. Then the whiteness closed down again, and as the

streaming bows cleft the dim grey roll apart the tinkle of bells answered the whistle's warning. There were narrow shaves as a matter of course, and collisions are not rare, but the old *Afghan* came through safely and met a snow-laden gale under Anticosti, while I well remember the first clear sight of our new country. It was a bitter morning, and yellow sunshine fell coldly out of a frosty sky. Under a heaven of cloudless blue the grim Laurentian ridges rolled back snow-covered towards the lonely North, while between the snow and water were sombre streaks of pinewoods and tin-roofed settlements. The bows were ribbed with ice, frozen spray spangled the deck, and the whole picture was cold and desolate.

"A hard country!" said one who had lived on the prairie, "and you don't get luxuries. Still, it's a real great country for the right kind of man."

Towards evening the snow came down again, and as we groped our way past nests of islands I sheltered behind a deck-house listening to the talk of the British emigrants. One speech was characteristic, and I give it

from memory. "Why did I come out? Because I had a missis and three children at home. I'm a strong man now, I am, but I won't be very long, and then it's the big doors of the Union I'm feared of for the missis an' me. How can you save with a family on fourteen shillin' a week! But I left her a little, and they thins turnips and harvests. I'm goin' to team it this season, they say the wages is good, an' then if all goes well I'll take up free land an' bring them out next spring."

There was his whole story in a nutshell, and this was a sturdy ploughman of sober, quiet speech, so I wished him God-speed, though I did not say it.

I also regret to record that the last night our little party ever spent together was celebrated by a carnival in the room where four of us lived in harmony and picturesque disorder. Some one played a banjo until the others broke it, and when the musician retaliated and riot commenced I wisely went on deck, where I presently saved from a watery grave the scion of a once famous family. As it was afterwards explained, a

genius had been feeding him with whiskey through a pipe, and he pointed out that tobacco taken in that way strangely affected his head. To judge from what happened after, that rescue was, humanly speaking, mistaken charity, for one household in the Dominion holds a bitter score against him. Next morning, sliding out of grey mist the *Afghan* breasted through the slushy ice, and made fast under the ramparts of historic Quebec, the first steamer to enter the St. Lawrence that season. Then a bidding of farewells followed a wild scramble for luggage, and with a last regretful look at the steamer we went clanking through Quebec in the big emigrant train into a region where everything was new.

CHAPTER II

ON THE WAY TO THE PRAIRIE

IT was three days, I think, to Winnipeg, in the long colonist train, and though I have travelled the road since, that journey left the sharpest impressions. For a time the big cars rolled smoothly through Southern Ontario, which was long a forest wilderness and is now the garden of Canada. The grim North Britons who made it so have gone back to the dust, but, as with all work well done, their deeds live after them. Like the first Hebrew leader they fought a weary battle without seeing the victory, hewing down the conifers and sowing the sickly oats that withered off among the rotting stumps, and dying poor left their children to reap the harvest. The Frenchman had been there before them trafficking in furs, and left the land as he found it, a desolation,

but they came of a colonist race, and to-day fair cities stand upon their graves.

So we swept past snug homesteads and many orchards, now frost-bound and naked, but soon to be rolled in the pink-flushed sheen of apple blossom, fields of furrowed loam, and broad pastures, while save for the split-rail fences, and the big bell clanging through the streets of some wooden town, one might have been translated into the Scottish lowlands. Then up past Sudbury into the wilderness, rattling under rock-scarred hills, and pounding through pine forests, over trestle-bridges, and past the boulders of lonely lakes, through the region Wolseley traversed when he crushed the half-breeds' rebellion, while here and there, not yet rotten, we saw the bateaux he had built. Then, by many a tiny settlement, shingle-roofed and built of wood, we lurched along the Superior shore, the wide, blue lake beneath us with its thin fringe of crackling ice, walls of red granite above the bouncing cars, and a savage region of stunted pine and bare rock ridge rolling north beyond. Also we dimly recognised what the men had done who,

spanning river and muskeg, or blasting a pathway through the heart of glacier-ribbed ranges, drove that swift steel highway three thousand miles from sea to sea across the Dominion, binding the older worlds together by the hands of the new.

It was by one of the many branches of the Lake of the Woods, I think, on the Manitoban border, that a certain episode happened which we had afterwards cause to remember. We lounged on the platform of a colonist car, a misty, forest-filled valley, hemmed in by overhanging crags, opening up on the one hand under faint moonlight, and on the other a dim expanse of water, while the resinous fragrance of the conifers mingled with the odour of creosote which reeks along each Canadian track. Angry voices broke out in the car behind, and Tom, who loved excitement, shoved me in through the door. Now the arrangement of a colonist car is this. At the one end is a small compartment, with a door invariably open, for smoking. Beyond, and on either side of the central alleyway, are transverse benches with a sliding board between them to sleep

upon, beside hinged shelves which may be drawn down from the roof above. You may purchase little curtains to screen them off, and then spreading a blanket, get what sleep you can, if the hard, polished maple does not find out too many soft places.

A couple of gaudy nickelled lamps were swinging erratically, and under the uncertain light Mellard stood with a bottle in his hand, insisting upon the company drinking some loyal toast, for he seemed to labour under the impression it was her Majesty's birthday. Another, who said he had been a journalist of Cork, steadfastly resisted, and when Mellard reproached him for his lack of loyalty, reached out and smote him suddenly in the eye, while two inebriated citizens of the greatest republic encouraged him to "Sail in, and break up the Britisher." Mellard retaliated, and things began to look ugly, for the odds were three to one. A rush was made upon our injudicious friend, and when we interposed it became clearly evident that here below at least the peacemaker is not always blessed, for that bottle got home with violence upon my fore-

head. Then for a few moments confusion followed, until a brakesman restored order by the aid of an iron bar, and Mellard was hustled for safety into another car with his garments rent half-way to the neck.

Meantime, a fragile English girl of refined appearance shrank back in a corner of the noisy car, fear mingled with the disgust on her face, which the husband who strove to comfort her could not quite allay. He was also an acquaintance, and when the turmoil was over, and wiping the dust of battle from our heated faces we went out on the platform, he presently joined us.

"I'm afraid your wife was frightened. This is no place for her. What made you bring her here?" said Tom in his offhand way, and perhaps because of a certain kindliness which softened their bluntness he could ask any question without incurring resentment. I glanced at the other, who hesitated before he answered. He was a thin, pale-faced man, stamped with the mark of intelligence, and, it seemed to me, inherited disease, while we had already noticed his hollow cough at times.

Then he said slowly to Tom, "You have been good to me, and I don't mind telling you. I was assistant clerk to the —— municipality, until they had to make room for a councillor's nephew. Very hard on me, but a usual thing, you know. I couldn't find another berth, and Flora and I were to have been married before the trouble came. Poor Flora! she was unhappy at home, and we determined to face the worst together. So we sailed the day after the wedding, and all my little savings are invested in a stock ranch owned by a man I knew north of Calgary. They say it's a healthy country, and we're neither very strong, you see."

I could make no fitting answer, and dare not express pity, for it seemed a hopeless case; but when he went away, Tom said savagely, "Doesn't it seem an infernal shame. A well-taught, winsome girl! and the life will probably kill him in six months—he's evidently gone in the lungs—then God help the poor woman! What can a girl like that do in a rough country?"

We met the pair later under other circumstances, and once it seemed as if the prediction would be justified.

But the trans-continental journey has been fully written about, and it is not the writer's intention to compile a railway guide. It was a weary combination of harassing vibration and a monotonous throb of whirring wheels, stuffy heat from the stove alternate with icy draughts, flitting pine-trees, and boys peddling "oanges" at so many cents apiece. Still, one would ask the question, why do the conductors prowl through the cars all night rousing one from restless slumber with an eternal demand for tickets, so that the worn-out pin the long sheet of paper to the front of their berths, and occasionally find it stolen when they awake. Then the woods were left behind and we ran out upon a level waste seamed with stunted willow groves and mostly flooded. It was springtime on the prairie, so the natives assured us, and we took their word for it, although from appearances the fact seemed doubtful. Snow beat against the windows and the flat stretch was streaked with white, while the eye fell everywhere upon sheets of water. Ice still dammed the creeks, and, deprived of their proper channel, the currents spread over the land.

At last, and devoutly thankful, we stood in Winnipeg station waiting for the train to pull out on the final stage of our journey. For some hours we had wandered through the square-laid, Keystone city, handsome in spite of its curious mixture of stone and wood, which, standing half-way between sea and sea, may some day rival Chicago. There was a roar of steam from the big locomotive, and an exchange of farewells —for this was a last parting of many friends— and with the big bell breaking through the shouts of "Good luck!" we rolled on west again. I recollect that night well, for it was bitterly cold, and our new skin coats crackled distressfully as we huddled in the corner of a second-class car. Hail rattled on the glass, and icy draughts swept through, while a commercial drummer kept dinning into my drowsy ears the assurance that this was a great country. Tom, because it was forbidden, insisted on smoking, and I remember he once emptied the hot ashes playfully down a companion's neck, who suddenly woke with fury, when the other said, "It was only meant in kindness, for if you sleep doubled-up like that, you'll go off in a fit."

At last my eyelids closed, and I must have lapsed into slumber, for I seemed to be walking in warm sunlight on an English lawn, though some one persistently pointed out what a high-class region this was for a real live young man. Then I was wakened with a jerk to a sense of loneliness, and blinking under the curtain shuddered at the snow-clogged prairie, while the hoot of the whistle rang overhead and there was a grinding of brakes.

"Moosomin," said the drummer, "and a smart place it is—one of the smartest on all the prairie. What do you think of it, stranger? If you only knew it, you are a lucky man. You haven't got rising towns like this in your hide-bound country."

Tom, who followed my example, doubtless saw the black loom of three gaunt elevators, with a cluster of low buildings behind them against a cloud-banked sky, and his answer was emphatic, "Since you've asked the question, I'll answer frankly. An unmitigated dog-hole; and if this is one of the smartest, what on earth are the others like?"

There was a yell of "Moos-oomin!" the

throb of wheels grew still, and leaving the drummer staring in pitying surprise, we dropped shivering on to the uneven track. Some one flourished a lantern, and we stumbled through the snow to the baggage car, where a drowsy official asked questions about the number of our check. Then he said, "Stand clear," and three boxes came flying through the air to roll down some feet of incline from the graded track. The bell commenced again, the long train rolled away, and we were left standing desolate among the snowdrifts of a strange country.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" Tom said, though I am not sure the word was hanged, "and this is one of the pleasant ways of their great country. It's my humble opinion they're only half-civilised. However, we can't stay here and freeze for ever."

I remember struggling with a weight of disgust and loneliness while I stared at the single black patch of building and beyond it the reach of dim prairie. There was a young English lad with us, and with difficulty we dragged the heavy boxes into the station, where Tom beat savagely on the door of a lighted room. Now

we had already learned that the Western railroad hand is in no way characterised by slavish servility, so we were not surprised at what followed. A man flung the door open, scowled at us, and said, "Shove them right in here, and be quick about it." After this, he superciliously watched us drag the baggage in, and banged the door in our faces.

Tom bestowed a hearty kick upon it, and, his patience breaking down, challenged the official to come out and be taught civility. But either because he was sleepy, or that civility had no value in that region, the official did not come, and Tom said wrathfully, "Well, we had better look for food and rest. I suppose there is some kind of hotel in the place."

Floundering through two feet of slush in what probably claimed to be a street, we found a rickety edifice which bore a legend describing it as the "Tecumesh" something, and here again we pounded on the door. After some ten minutes a window was thrown up, and an angry voice demanded with many adjectives what we wanted.

"Some breakfast," Tom answered fiercely,

and the voice recommended us to seek it in the bottomless pit, after which the window came crashing down.

"A nice people!" Tom said, "and they seem quite proud of themselves. Anyway, we can't stay here starving, and with the help of the chart Charlie sent we'll manage to find his place by the compass. Failing that, we can bring up at Cæsar's; he said it was more than half-way."

So, cold and hungry and worn out, we prepared for a march which might be thirty miles, while Cæsar's was twenty, for our resident partner, in case he was too busy to meet us, had sent a rough sketch showing the trail. It was a heartless undertaking, and the grim, cold welcome was curiously trying, but as Tom said we did not expect luxuries, so we were not disappointed. The very young Englishman, however, seemed utterly cast down. He had come out with a brand-new rifle and romantic ideas of following wild cattle upon fiery mustangs, slaying scores of timber wolves, and other heroic things, and now the hard reality was too much for him. Perhaps Tom remembered the black-robed woman who had placed

her son in his care, for he laid his hand kindly on the lad's arm as he said, "Take heart, it's only the beginning, and all beginnings are bad. You said you wanted to go to sea, and you can take my word for it the sea is very much worse than this."

For perhaps two hours we plodded across a wide waste of grass, clogged with snow in the hollows, withered and harsh above, and a bitter wind lashed our faces with the intermittent flakes. Then the snow ceased and an angry flush of crimson broke through sombre clouds in the east, while as the light grew brighter we saw in all its nakedness and lonely grandeur the breadth of prairie. Round the four points of the compass ran the swelling levels, as it were an endless succession of frozen waves, while here and there birch copses rose up like islands. Spring was unusually late that year, and as we shortly heard just a night or two before a blizzard had swept the white waste, in which six persons perished. But the story of how hungry and aching we plodded south across a circle that ever crept onwards with us might grow mono-

tonous, and sometime before noonday a moving speck in the distance grew nearer and larger until it resolved itself into a waggon and team. The driver, who resembled a polar bear in his coat of skins, asked few questions, for the prairie settlers are a very kindly race. So, though it meant a *détour* of many miles to him, he at once offered to take us to our new possessions. Then cloud and grass and birch copse flitted swiftly by, while lying upon a sack of grain I watched them languidly out of half-closed eyes, until at last I sat upright, partly awake, for we had arrived.

Against a ridge of birches stood a tiny frame-house, the straw-pile granary behind it resembling a mountain of hard-packed snow. A broad stretch of knee-high stubble ran all about it, and this is the general aspect of a prairie home. Then the recollections grow hazy, for I was almost asleep, and I only remember vaguely answering questions and swallowing a little food, after which I forgot everything on a couch of furs above a substratum of prairie hay whose fragrance is that of thyme and peppermint.

CHAPTER III

THE SPRING SOWING

THERE are people who write newspaper articles, and occasionally pamphlets, with the laudable object of showing how easy it is for an industrious man to enter the prairie with nothing but good intentions and build up a competence by settling on Government land, though it is sometimes added—perhaps through fear of a hereafter—that £100 capital is an advantage. Also there are settlers who cheerfully testify how they came in with empty hands, and to-day, after a few years' pleasant experience, possess extensive wheat-lands and many head of stock. Now the writer has a great regard for this hardworking and generally truthful race, so, after learning the history of some and how they did it, he would only ask the question, "Why do they say such things?" Had it been any other class who

made the statements he could hardly have avoided the conclusion that they were lying deliberately. Of course, men have worked up from nothing to a state of moderate wealth, but where one succeeds hundreds fail, and at the best of times it is a very trying process. The successes are quoted everywhere, but the failures no one hears about.

In our own case we paid the equivalent of £30 sterling yearly for the 320-acre farm partly "broken," had bought implements, oxen, and horses which considerably exceeded that £100, and when we totalled up preliminary expenses the result was appalling. Still, shirking the question what would happen if we lost that crop, we set to work in earnest at the spring ploughing. As Tom said, "We are either going to get rich, or be cleaned out completely."

The first operation was to burn the stubble off, for straw being unsaleable in the North-West, but little is cut with the ears. So the flinty, yellow stalks stood knee-deep upon our possessions, until one day of bright sunshine when a rush of scented breeze swept the

prairie we laid bundles of oiled papers along the windward side. A box of sulphur matches did the rest, and when the broad wave of crimson had licked up the last of it we were ready to begin. With the help of the resident partner we led the three teams, two half-broken horses and four oxen, forth. Charlie, the former, had been when I last saw him an awkward, bashful youth in an office at home. Now four years' hard work in the Dominion had transformed him into a handsome, resolute man, and instead of adding coarseness had indued him with a curious refinement.

I can still recall the tall, sinewy figure in long boots and blue canvas overalls, standing beside the oxen with a smile on the snow-bronzed face, while his bearing was rather that of a cavalry officer than a field plodder. It was a revelation, and testified plainly what a new country could do. Nevertheless, his instructions were not explicit: "We've no time to be particular, and the great thing is to turn the clod over, so start right in, and see what you can do."

Amid a few blue-water expletives from Tom

we somehow hung the harness about the oxen; then I gripped my plough-stilts, and for the first time drove the steel-tipped share into the black alluvium left by some post-glacial deluge thousands of years ago. I had once or twice handled a plough at home, but it was harassing work, because the ways of oxen are devious and hard to understand. Buck and Bright seemed always tired, and on the first excuse would lie down peacefully, while the former insisted on rubbing his shoulder against his comrade, with the result that he edged him sideways over half the ploughing. Tom's beasts did likewise, and being of inventive turn of mind, he spent one night knocking wire nails through two boards, which we afterwards hung about the rubbed ones' necks. This was not, however, a great success, for Buck seemed to like it, and next day I could not keep my team straight at all, so we took counsel together, and with several hours' misspent labour filed every nail-point sharp as a needle. The result of this was disaster, for the first time Buck rubbed himself he flung his heels in the air, lowered his head with a bellow, and followed

by Bright plunged off with the upset plough across the prairie, until fouling themselves in the traces the two came down together in a mixed-up, kicking heap. When we had disentangled them the senior partner, waxing sarcastic, said, "This may be interesting, as a pastime, you know, but it isn't helping us to get in the wheat, and if you break those beasts' legs it's a hundred dollars gone out of our capital."

In order to gather the harvest before the autumn frost it is necessary to commence ploughing as soon as the surface is soft, with the result that every here and there the share brings up with violence on a still frozen lump. Oxen and horses learn this by painful experience, and a good beast knows just when to stop to save the vicious jerk upon his collar. Ours did not, however, so each time the traction increased they halted, and it took minutes to persuade them there was no frost-bind ahead. At this Tom lost his patience completely, because as he said, "A deck hand is hard to drive, but it takes all the dignity out of a man to stand half the morning arguing with an ox." Also at the expiration of each

noonday rest they waded deep into a miry sloo where the melted snow formed a miniature lake, and neither clods nor endearments might induce them to come out, until I followed with a pikel and wet myself to the waist. But in spite of difficulties the ploughing went on, and furrows more or less serpentine covered part of our holding. Then the harrows were run through it, and we had assistance with the sowing, while it was characteristic of a kindly people that our neighbour Jasper, when asked by older friends to lend them his seeder, said, "No, you can sow well enough by hand. The new men yonder can't, so I'm going to send the seeder and best team to them."

All this time we rose at 5 a.m., fresh, contented, and vigorous, to labour until the long northern twilight faded into dusk, and often after when there was any moon, and it became apparent that a healthy man can out-tire a beast. An unbroken sweep of azure hung ever above us, flooded with yellow sunlight or strewn by lambent stars. Every breeze stirred the pulses, and our rusty bacon, molasses, and flapjacks might have been deli-

cacies, while, there being no time for cleaning, we lived among the stove-baked clods and several inches of dust. Meantime a flush of greenness crept over the white prairie, the crackling grasses grew tender, and were chequered by mosaics of flowers. Then when the last bushel of seed-wheat had been buried in the loam, there was virgin sod to be "braken" and hay to cut for the winter, and this was not an easy matter. The natural grass on the levels is far too short to be worth cutting, so one must gather it in the swampy sloos where it grows waist-high, and thus the hay-harvest is collected from anywhere in a radius of four or five miles. Further, sawn lumber on part of the prairie is worth its weight in silver; birch logs fit for building are particularly scarce, and thus for lack of shelter implements are mostly kept just where they last were used. It took a day to find the rusty mower half-buried in a sloo, another one hammering and oiling, and then the work began, and each night we walked home under the moonlight beside a load of wiry grass scented like a nosegay with wild peppermint.

And so we laboured, growing harder and stronger every day, though now and then the thought would rise whether that cold-green rising wheat would return us many dollars or be blighted by the frost. Next we cleaned out miry wells, tried to thin down the gophers, drove ten miles to a birch bluff for fuel, and did the myriad "chores" which occupy a settler's leisure. Idleness is an unknown quality upon the prairie, so much so that the writer once engaging to do certain farm work was told that while he rested at dinner-time the last man carried water for the cattle. Thus summer burned on in shortlived heat, the green flush on the prairie faded into white again, and thirsty mosquitoes came forth in their millions. Therefore we worked anointed with rankest kerosene, while when Tom had almost lost the sight of his eyes he enveloped head and shoulders in a meat-safe kind of net. But one incident broke through the even tenor, and as this was typical its relation may not be out of place.

Ingram, of Ingram's bluff, came up out of Ontario a good many years ago, a worthy

descendant of his rugged forbears. He had gathered together unto himself lands and cattle, but prosperity had not changed his nature, which was of the hard and stiffnecked kind.

Now for the good of this region where prairie-fires are prevalent, a wise regulation has been drafted which requires every settler to plough parallel furrows about his holding which will generally turn a fire aside. But because the law said, "Thou shalt plough fireguards so many furrows broad," Ingram declared he would not, and commented freely upon the mental infirmity of the men who framed that regulation. There are others like him, and if the authorities had known them better they would have made it penal to turn these furrows, because in a free country men occasionally find strange delight in doing the opposite of what they are told. Once I remember a hotel-keeper alluding to a certain prohibition act much as follows: "Ruin us! no sir, no ruin at all—it works out just like this. I'll sell as much, contraband, at a dollar as I did for twenty-five cents on the square, and they'll plank it down willingly for the satis-

faction of beating the law." So Ingram sinned with cheerfulness and deliberate intent, and he nearly suffered for his folly.

One night we drove in a box-waggon across the prairie, for Driscoll, our neighbour ten miles away, having sold his cattle well, was giving a feast to celebrate his victory over the unscrupulous dealers. It was a clear, cool night, with a breeze one drank in like wine waking low music from the rippling grass, and save for this the beat of unshod hoofs rang monotonously through a great silence. We were none of us given to sentiment, but something in the great arch of ether overhead and the vast dusky plain below held us still with a sense of infinite majesty. Even Tom felt this, for he said, "Reminds me of the breathless nights we lay rolling under the line—what is it in sea and prairie that makes you think at times what you can't put into words? Charlie, stop that pipe squeaking, it jars on the fitness of things."

Charlie laughed half aloud as he filled it again, and shook the reins a little as we breasted up a slope. Then we gained a higher level, perhaps a beach of some

prehistoric sea, and could see the great sweep of neutral and purple extending until it melted into indigo along the horizon. This was round three sides. On the fourth a rolling dinginess blotted out the stars, and below lines and blurs of crimson came creeping out of the smoke.

"Several fires coming down-wind," said Charlie sententiously. "You can smell the burning already. Never saw them brighter, and I wonder how many obstinate fools are going to be burnt out to-night."

Now except in thrilling narratives, and just when a gale is blowing where the sloo grass is high, a prairie fire is rarely dangerous to the traveller who, when he sees it coming, has sufficient sense to go another way. It travels with a kind of impressive regularity, and when he perceives where its path lies, on the principle of not disputing with a rattlesnake the ownership of its hole, the wise man turns aside. So Charlie, as Tom said, altered the course a point or two, and we held on unheeding until a rapid beat of hoofs came out of the dinginess. It grew rapidly nearer and louder, until a man leaning forward over the

neck of a lathering horse flashed past us like a whirlwind. Charlie hailed him sharply, and we caught the breathless words he flung over his shoulder: "Fire heading for Ingram's—blanked fool Ingram won't plough fireguards. Driscoll's party's coming; I'm leading the way."

Whatever may be the settlers' faults they stand by one another in times of adversity, lending a poorer neighbour seed-wheat or implements, and gladly sharing what they have with the less fortunate. So much so that it is said a few close-handed persons have risen to affluence by purchasing nothing of their own. This the writer would plainly testify in memory of their kindnesses to him, although he cannot say as much for the inhabitants of the cities. Thus without a comment Charlie pulled round his horses, and as the half-broken bronchos quickened their stride, we heard a clamour following behind. Louder and louder it grew until, and because our team's strongest point was trying to kick the front of the waggon in, a mixed-up mass of rigs ranged level with us. There were spider-wheeled sulkies, light box-waggons, four splendid horses

stretching out at headlong gallop before a larger one carrying a gang-plough, and one burly figure on horseback leading them in their flight. For a time our little bronchos held their place, and we swept on neck and neck through the dewy darkness, the cool wind lashing our faces and the clods whirling up behind.

Clinging to the edge of the waggon I held on for dear life, the light frame bouncing and groaning under me, while Charlie's form swayed to and fro upon the driving-seat. With a thunder of hoofs and a whirr of wheels we rushed at a sloo, and crackling harshly the tall grass went down under the pounding feet, while behind four galloping horses the waggon with the gang-plough was hustled down the hollow like a field-gun going into action. Then some one shouted, "Rah, we're going to do it yet. There's Ingram's straight ahead, and the fire's not past the bluff," and again Charlie yelled words of wild encouragement to the little horses; but how we reached Ingram's and fought the fire there demands space in another chapter.

CHAPTER IV

HOW WE CHECKED THE FIRE

PRESENTLY a birch bluff loomed up ahead, a mass of ebony foliage outlined against crimson, for the fire was also hurrying towards Ingram's somewhere not far behind. Now upon the prairies a bluff is generally no kind of head or hill, only a straggling wood of wind-dwarfed birches, and that mass of interlacing branches looked horribly dangerous. But the western settlers travel by compass, straight across deep-sunk ravines or through the scattered woods, and now in time of urgent need they were not going round. So amid a smashing of branches yells of warning rang out ahead, and I saw the gang-plough waggon hurled headlong at the wood, and held on the tighter knowing I should witness an exhibition of reckless horsemanship. A branch slashed me across the forehead, brushing away my hat, the waggon

tilted half-upright as two wheels left the ground, and I could just see the horses as they plunged through matted leaves. Then there came a shock which set every bone in my body quivering. Still Charlie sat bolt upright with a steady grip on the reins, and his wild whoops to the horses rang out above the din.

Somehow we came out safely, and saw much nearer than we liked a broad crimson crescent, perhaps eight hundred yards from wing to wing, rolling leisurely but irresistibly along, licking up the prairie grass under a cloud of sparks. The pace further increased, though that seemed impossible, for it was above all things desirable we should reach the threatened homestead well before the fire arrived, and disregarding the risk of badger-holes we thundered on in a mad race across the dim prairie. At last, shaken half to pieces, I flung myself thankfully to earth among the rearguard of the salvors, but where Tom and Charlie went to I never knew, for the waggon was swallowed in a chaos of shouting men and plunging beasts. Still through it all I could hear big Driscoll's voice, as with flung-out hands he gave his orders.

Next, being willing to help at anything, I found myself holding the heads of a struggling team, while a man I did not know was busy in an apparently hopeless attempt to harness them to a plough. At intervals he reviled me for unhandiness, until it seemed he should have finished when I struck the nearest horse and we started suddenly on a fierce race with destruction. The matter was easy, to understand that is to say, though somewhat difficult of execution. If we could plough so many furrows across its pathway the fresh mould might turn the fire aside. If not Ingram's homestead would assuredly go up in smoke, and that roaring line of fire appeared ominously near. But the prairie sod crackled under the biting share, and I strove to check the horses from bolting incontinently into the tall wheat, until it was time to swing the plough at the end of the furrow. We did it with difficulty, holding our own place stubbornly among the followers, for the team was badly frightened, though not before one of them had fouled himself in the traces, and I was further encouraged by scathing comments on my general ability. Then I glanced up to wind-

ward, and saw a rolling red wave, now rising now falling, move down towards us. The horses saw it also, for they strove to stand upright, and performed other trying feats of equine gymnastics. But, twice lifted from my feet, and once kicked badly, I held on, and was rewarded by hearing my companion's gasping opinion about the blanked stupidity of a raw Britisher.

Before we had turned half that furrow wreaths of hot smoke blew in our faces, and how I kept the horses to their task I do not exactly know. There were also better teams doing similar work, and presently with a cracking of whips, breathless shouts, and horses hitched on anywhere a clevis would hang, the gang-plough came up and passed. I could hear the hoofs tear up the virgin sod, and the matted roots parting under the parallel shares, while the black clods swirling off from the mould-boards curled over behind it like the wash of a steamer's propeller. Single teams also met us working the opposite way, and then the matter ended so far as we were concerned, for a rush of hot air scorched our faces, and

folds of acrid smoke blotted out everything. Thereupon the team went mad altogether, and I was left sitting stamped upon and choking in the smoke, while with upset plough and its holder trailing behind together they vanished completely. I did not know what became of him, though I could hear gulps of vivid language rise from somewhere among the wheat, and did not very much care, for whatever were his virtues he possessed a wicked tongue. When at last I limped shakily to the end of the furrow I saw scared horses bolting across the country, and realised that we had commenced another phase of the battle.

"Rustle round with the wet sacking," roared Driscoll, "it's bigger than I like, then stand by and do your levelest. There won't be much left of Ingram's if it gains a footing."

So the line spread out extending for attack, and men waited quietly with armfuls of wet sacking while waves of intense heat beat on their dripping faces. Being new to the business, I took Driscoll's hint to keep the fighting line supplied with fresh-soaked grain bags from the man-hauled waggon, and then the flaming cres-

cent rolled right up to us. How high it was I could not say. It seemed twenty feet, but was probably scarcely six. It checked at the first furrow, and roaring fiercely stretched forth little red feelers to catch the tufts of grass between, that they might act as a bridge and help it across. Then with swinging grain bags the men fell upon it, stamping, smiting, and shouting like beings of another world, with dense smoke swirling round them and red sparks overhead.

Just how long this lasted I could not say, probably not five minutes though it might have been a day, for my throat was stuck together and breath seemed taken from me by the rolling smoke. Still, I know I blistered my fingers and burned holes in my garments dancing and clawing probably uselessly at little spurts of flame, while men who waited fresh supplies heaped anathemas on my name. Some I could hear gasping and sobbing in the fervent heat, smoke-choked and blinded, but hanging on to their post, while one drenched with water and savage with pain charged right into a fizzling mass and tore at it in fury. Then, while

their garments smouldered, a half-breathless roar of triumph ran along the line, for two divided walls of fire rolled on across the prairie, leaving Ingram's homestead unscathed between.

Thereupon the blackened Driscoll stood up on a waggon, and said, "This is what comes of pig-headed foolishness, and all the food in Ingram's wouldn't feed a third of you. So we'll go back to my place and begin again on the fun, and when the harvest's over we'll fine him the most gilt-edged spread ever seen in Western Canada. You'll have to ride double-banked, for I should say half the horses are making record time on the way to Dacotah."

Driscoll was probably right, so, packed like barrelled herrings in the waggons or riding two and two, we journeyed towards his holding, making the night hideous with our songs of victory, while far off along the horizon the coyotes raised their voices and howled in harmony. Then a broad red moon lifted herself from out the sea of grass, crept upwards from the horizon, and silver radiance brightened across the prairie. In due time we reached Driscoll's, where because water is scarce in

summer, most of us ate first supper just as we were, and joining in the dances neither the salvors nor their partners seemed to enjoy it any less on account of black faces or the print of sooty fingers on the calico bodice.

Mrs. Driscoll also sprinkled the wounded with oil and flour, and I remember afterwards sitting by her on the strawpile-granary, which is the refuse from the threshing piled up many feet thick over a birch-branch framing. Wind-packed and weighted by snow, with walls a fathom through, or sometimes twice as much, it answers its purpose very effectively. My hostess was a buxom matron of thirteen stone at least, and during a dance I did not know had stamped on me cruelly, so now devoutly thankful that she did not want to dance again I dipped her up refreshment from a pail of Ontario cider. Mrs. Driscoll was a power in that country, and had taken a fancy to me. Also, if her speech was homely her worth was genuine, and I had heard of the many kindnesses she did with an iron hand. She had been a dairy drudge, she told me with extraneous

details, at home, and now ruled over Driscoll's homestead, six hundred acres of plough land, and I don't know how many head of stock, though I had their full pedigree from the beginning, and with some reason she concluded by saying, "So you see this country is quite good enough for me."

By this time the moon was high above us, lighting the prairie to its far circumference, and the narrowing shadows of stock-shed and granary were black as ebony. In the space between them stalwart men and comely women moved through quaint country dances with many figures, which had been combined from those of North Britain and measures trodden in the olden days of France. A French-Canadian, with the habitant's inherited skill, wiled sweet music from a battered violin, and the air he played was three hundred years old. The men who kept time to it were such as any nation might have been proud to own. Straight-limbed, athletic, with neither stamp of care on their faces nor toil-bent shoulders, they looked what they were, a free and sturdy people. Nevertheless, they probably worked half as

hard again as the average British labourer. Their women were like to them, clear of eye and ruddy of skin, and though attired mostly in the work of their own fingers they had little cause to envy their sisters at home. It is perhaps worthy of mention that throughout Western Canada you rarely see an untidy woman—at least the writer did not, even far up in the bush, which is the more remarkable considering that often every article they purchase must be "packed" weary leagues on the husband's shoulders.

Nor was there the taint of alcoholic indulgence in any of them; indeed in that region the almost universal beverage is green tea, and though some set forth its evils, at least it does not produce beast-like, half-useless men and besotted women. Instead, there was only clean-hearted merriment, and again the influence of healthy environment was made manifest. Perhaps the time may never come, but if the mother country has urgent need of her outland sons she will have little cause to be ashamed of them when they answer the call.

The scent of wild peppermint hung gratefully

in the air, the music was strangely soothing, and the straw-pile soft, and I suppose when my hostess went away I must have fallen asleep, for after a space of oblivion I suddenly became conscious it was time for us to go. The guests were slipping harness and saddles on the remaining horses, ready perhaps for a thirty mile journey, women chattered about the hostess, and Driscoll's loud-voiced banter was ringing everywhere, so after a hearty hand-grip we started out contentedly for a ten-mile tramp home. This was because our horses, upset by the fire, had evidently taken a week's holiday.

The prairie was weird and ghostlike in the dim grey light, the merry voices died away, and the mournful wail of a coyote followed us instead as we strode on into a region of silence, shivering a little in the cool breeze of dawn. Later, with a noisy beat of wings, a flight of half-seen crane lumbered by overhead, a fox slunk across our pathway doubtless on some prairie chicken's track, and with a shrill scream to its fellow a hawk dropped like a thunderbolt from the neutral vault. The creatures of the prairie knew it was time to be up and doing.

Then a crimson streak broadened and brightened along the horizon, the red sun leapt up above the wide white sea, and I remember it was characteristic of the country that when the first golden rays touched our faces our paces quickened as Tom saluted the new bright day with a burst of song.

CHAPTER V

A RUINED HARVEST

THUS the scorching summer changed to autumn, and that it can be fiercely hot on the prairie the writer, who has stewed in the tropics, is free to testify. Still, each time the sun dipped a little cool breeze sprang up, and even in the blaze of noonday one could always work. This, however, had little to do with the thermometer, and was probably due to something in that invigorating air. Bronzed to the colour of coffee, clad mostly in ragged blue shirts, we only grew more contented with constant labour, and the one thing we missed was sufficient water. The well was fouled by gophers, of which more hereafter, and our domestic washing was generally conducted in a neighbouring sloo which for some unknown reason held a little moisture. There garments went in grey with the fibrous dust of grass, and

came forth mouse-colour, while I now and then rode six miles for the luxury of a bath.

A little creek zigzagged across the sea of grass, deep sunk in a ravine like a railway cutting, which is the usual fashion of a prairie stream. In one place under the shadows of a willow bluff lay a few sluggish pools whose banks of fissured and shrunken mire bore the spoor of many thirsty creatures. By wading knee-deep through ooze and reeds one might reach depth to swim, and wallow with swinging left arm through lukewarm water in and out among dappling shadows and patches of golden light. Sometimes I had strange company during these ablutions, for from leagues of dusty grass coyotes, badgers, jack-rabbits, and other beasts of the kind had foregathered there, and once a grizzled timber wolf, who had wandered from the north, flitted among the trees until I hid myself behind the reeds that he might come and drink. It also happened later, when I helped to relay a portion of the Canadian Pacific track across a white waste of Alberta where spirals of bitter alkali dust whirled like snow-clouds before each fiery breeze, that we rode

eleven miles on a trolley past bitter lakes for a draught of clean water. But that is a reminiscence which has nothing to do with the story.

Meantime the wheat grew tall in broad belts of cold indigo-green which rippled musically like the waves of a lapping sea, and now and then I stood and watched it swaying against a background of yellow-white prairie. Overhead the cumulus rolled slowly in milky masses across the sun-flooded blue, while straw-pile and sod-built stable flung breadths of neutral shadow upon the grass, day after day the same, and seldom monotonous. There was, however, more than artistic interest in that picture, for most objects in the foreground were the work of our own hands, and the bright wash that toned it was the hope of prosperity. With blistered palms, and bleeding fingers, we had called that wheat up out of the prairie, built and shovelled in scorching heat and had fairly won what was promised in the sweat of the brow. And now, if all went well, we would shortly reap the fruit of our labour.

Among the episodes I remember best was

the monthly house-cleaning, which we started with a shovel, for the floor was deep with clods, and then opened wide both windows that the dust might blow right through, which it did in clouds as though the place were burning. Then we sprinkled wet wild peppermint upon the boards, rubbed the guns down with vaseline, and rested contented to inspect the result. Trophies of splendid wheat and oats hung festooned upon the wall, moths as large as sparrows were pinned along one end of it, while the littered tool and harness rack gave the last touch needed of picturesque disorder. But all pleasant things have an ending, and in due time the rude awakening came.

We were driving back one Sunday from a visit to a neighbour thirty miles away, and the afternoon was sweltering though the sun was dimmed by a curious misty halo. I lay in the waggon bottom on a sack of prairie hay, and Tom sat beside me sucking drowsily at his pipe, while the senior partner drove and made calculations as to the proceeds of the harvest. Wheat that year was seventy-five cents the bushel, cash down, delivered at the elevators,

and he proved to his full satisfaction this would leave an ample balance after paying all expenses. I also speculated upon the presents I would send home to prove my friends' predictions wrong, and presently Charlie set forth how next year after sowing a double acreage we should enjoy a holiday in the old country—all of which was somewhat premature, as transpired shortly.

By and by I looked up to find the sun had gone, blotted out by a streak of ragged vapour, while a bank of sombre clouds rolled up from the north. Higher they crept and higher in dingy masses, and perhaps it was partly contrast, but a livid, unearthly radiance seemed to flicker across the whitened prairie. A circle of withered buffalo bones, such as sprinkle the grass lands from Brandon to Calgary and are collected by the Blackfeet for sugar refining, gleamed almost incandescent beside the green fringe of a sloo, and a few crane's feathers became specks of dazzling white.

Then the heavens were wrapped in an intense blue blackness, and a little rush of breeze, icy cold this time, awoke a shrill pattering from the

grass. The horses instinctively quickened their pace, and Charlie looked anxious.

"A hailstorm brewing, and a bad one at that," he said. "We'll make for the big bluff yonder, and look for shelter. You haven't seen it hail here; well, you'll witness something that will surprise you."

It did not need a touch of the whip to stir the team to their best, for the beasts knew by experience what it meant to meet the battering hail in the open, and they stretched out at a flying gallop. The ridge of stunted trees seemed rushing nearer, a long growl of thunder rolled clashing among the cloud-banks overhead, and before the next one came a broad sheet of fire smote down upon the grass. The team lost their heads at that, and half-frantic dashed in among the trees, where Charlie had a struggle to halt them in the thickest of the wood. We were only just in time, for with a deafening crash of thunder the heavens were opened, and the hail came whirring down. It was not the fine grain one sees in Britain, but the murderous hail of the North-West, huge lumps of ragged ice, some of which were almost

the size of walnuts. There was blackest darkness outside the bluff, within nothing visible but a driving sheet of ice smashing through the leaves, and a constant fluttering down of mangled foliage. It rattled like grape-shot upon the waggon, drove the horses mad with pain as it struck their skin, and once, when I held them from bolting, my face and hands might have been thrashed with rods, while Charlie's cheek was freely bleeding.

Then the wind came and filled all the bluff with tumultuous roaring, through which we could hear the birches thrashing each other, and now and then the crash of a falling tree. Swinging branches lashed us, so that afterwards my shoulder was coloured with patches of blue. The torn-off twigs whirled down like leaves in autumn, and that we were not slain altogether was probably due to the fact that there were no trees large enough. This may have lasted ten minutes, perhaps a few longer, then the turmoil suddenly ceased, and one bright shaft of sunlight pierced through the battered wood. We emptied the ice and twigs from the waggon, and there seemed a hundredweight of it, and

then went forth into a glorious freshness. The sky was clear blue behind us, and the grass-lands flooded with mellow light, but one black arch drove on southwards to spread devastation over a hundred leagues of prairie. It is curious that while one at least of the party ought to have been warned by experience, we should have no premonition of what awaited us. So we laughed and chatted as the horses hurried along on their homeward journey, until crossing a rise in the evening beyond which our holding lay, the bronze paled in Charlie's face, and he stood up saying hoarsely, "Good Lord! look at the wheat."

Then he laid the lash along the horses' backs, and no one spoke until we sprang to earth beside the first furrow. Then a numb sickness, mingled with a sense of cold fury which too many poor mortals know, came upon me, for there was only ruin where the wheat—had been. A battery of field-guns driven through and through it could not have done half that damage. Broad swaths of half-hardened stems had been cut down as by a scythe. Green blades and swelling ears lay beaten into ribands

and partly buried in the steaming earth, while as if in grim irony, one tiny corner had been left unscathed. Afterwards it was cut, and thrashed out—forty bushels, and that was all we ever reaped of the hoped-for harvest. Strange to say, our next neighbour's holding, only a mile away, was not touched at all, for the storm in question swept on into Dacotah, blotting out one breadth of grain and sparing the next, leaving ruin chequered behind it on a draught-board principle.

Tom unharnessed the horses, and the senior partner swore softly and viciously as he prepared a meal, but having little heart for food I wandered half the night after coyotes across the prairie. In that frame of mind it would have been a relief to murder something, which was of course reprehensible, but this is a plain story. Also, when I was roused at dawn from a broken sleep to face the position again, I found Charlie sitting in the doorway and staring at the rising sun with bloodshot eyes. There was only ruin before us, for our last dollar was almost spent. We had gone in too heavily, as others had done before, instead of reserving

something to meet a bad harvest. Between autumn frost which spoils the grain, seasons of unusual dryness, and devastating hail throughout much of the North-West, the proportion of lost crops is often heavy. There are successive bad years, and others equally good, so the man with money to tide him over times of adversity may on the whole do well.

Later, we took counsel together, and after much discussion, and some dissension, decided to remain and try another year working on credit. It was a forlorn hope after all, for there is very little actual money in Western Canada, and the credit system is one of the blights of the country. With interest at 10 per cent. or more, as it was then for that kind of risk, under the best of circumstances we could hardly hope to earn more than food to eat, while another bad harvest would involve us hopelessly. Still, such is the way of a country where crops are hypothecated before they are sown, and any man may obtain implements on a written promise. The dealers take the risk of the weather, and after a disastrous harvest all suffer alike. Also, it sometimes

happens that when the storekeeper comes round to collect payment he finds the settler's dwelling left desolate, with a legend chalked on the doorway for the benefit of sorrowing creditors: "Busted, and lit out for British Columbia."

So we prepared to make the best of it, which meant living on the scantiest of rations until the next harvest came, and might have done it but that fate intervened in the shape of the gopher. Now the humble gopher being a factor in the settler's life merits at least passing mention. He is an insignificant creature like a British squirrel with a similar tail, though rat-fashion he burrows in the ground, but what two rats could eat in a week one gopher eats in a day. Also his greatest weakness is half-ripe grain, and he can clean up a field of wheat almost as neatly as a Toronto binder. Thus, in a disastrous season what the smut and frost spare the gopher takes, and for his special benefit the Government serves out free strychnine to the settlers.

So during the rest of that autumn the gophers troubled us, among other things they should

not have done, tunnelling through the cool mould about the well, into which they fell by scores and perished there. The result was that all we ate or drank was flavoured with gopher extract, and our tempers having been sorely tried, this led to heated arguments. The senior partner maintained there were more condemned gophers upon our holding than anywhere else in the Dominion, while the others declared there were not, and, frivolous as it may appear, it was these disputes which eventually split up the partnership. So Tom and I determined to go on further West, while Charlie remained behind in the hope of better luck next year. Poor Charlie had had a hard time, twice losing a season's wages when the harvest failed and his employer had nothing wherewith to pay, and another two years' savings had been swallowed in the present venture. I remember the day we parted, and left him nailing up door and window preparatory to a month's track-grading on the Souris railroad.

"Goodbye, and the best of luck to you; we'll forget our differences," he said. "If I can help it, that wretched Hudson shan't get in here and

camp. Once inside he'll stop all winter, and I'm pretty sick of him."

The individual in question was a Bachelor of Arts who drove round the prairie all summer peddling patent nostrums and German oleographs. In the winter he boarded himself gratis upon some settler, and the testimony was that he not only refused on principle to render the slightest help, but that until the spring came he never washed himself. Yet it speaks well for Western hospitality that he had seldom a difficulty in finding quarters. So the ringing of Charlie's hammer followed us as we moved away, until turning on the crest of a rise we saw him looking back wistfully after us. There was the last wave of a battered hat, a faintly heard farewell, and we were alone on the breadth of prairie. Two hours later we dropped our packs beside a lonely sod-house, where the young English lad who came out with us was serving his apprenticeship to the wheat-growing.

He was perhaps the most pleasantly mannered youth I ever came across, refined and aristocratic, with the evidence of careful train-

ing, and we found him cleaning a hen-house which had not been cleaned for years.

"Enjoying your little self," Tom said, when he had briefly mentioned our decision, and the other, glancing down with loathing at his unsavoury garments answered—

"It isn't the work I hate so much as that drunken brute, for I feel he takes a special pleasure in setting me to this kind of thing. The only bad man I have come across between here and Moosomin, and my guardians paid him a hundred pounds to teach me farming. You wouldn't mind very much, would you, if I went on with you?"

Tom smiled a little, and I felt we should have declined, but my partner could not resist the longing in the lad's eyes, and so we accepted another responsibility. Then we found a sheet of paper in the filthy house, and pinned it on the table bearing the message: "With Henry Easton's compliments—he was getting tired of you." Also Tom chuckled as he added over his name: "This serves you right, Parkin. Clean your hen-house out yourself, and be hanged to you," for we had had a difference with that pupil-taking settler.

In parenthesis it may be stated that this is generally a bad system. A young man willing to thoroughly learn his work can readily find an opening and be paid for it, and such training is often better in the end than that he pays a premium for.

Late at night we stood on the little platform watching a distant yellow twinkle grow larger and brighter across the wide prairie, down which the straight track narrowed in a long perspective, until it resolved itself into a fan-shaped blaze of radiance from the headlight of a big locomotive. Then the train came panting in, we climbed on board a car, and soon the roofs of Moosomin faded into the night.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE ALBERNI TRAIL

IT was a hot day late in spring when, weighed down by a miscellaneous load, I tramped wearily past the little colliery town of Nanaimo, which stands above Departure Bay on the eastern shore of Vancouver Island. With Henry Easton, Tom and I had done many things in the meantime before we crossed the snow-tipped Rockies into British Columbia, including the re-grading of a portion of the Canadian Pacific track, when we laboured with shovel and ballast-scoop, or, uniting together, defied a domineering foreman who fancied he could impose upon an unsophisticated Britisher. When so engaged our chief amusement was to watch the long daily train roll by loaded with fresh recruits for the adventurous legion.

These were for the most part under twenty, and generally carried long knives and rifles,

under the delusion that they were entering a savage region instead of going to dwell among as law-abiding a people as any on the earth. Again it may be observed that the picturesque desperado sometimes described in works of fiction is practically an unknown being in British territory, and the writer at least never came across a full-fledged specimen. There are of course daring men and reckless adventurers, but these may not be found hunting citizens through the streets or discharging their pistols at a new arrival's toes, perhaps from the reason that they have something better to do. Also, when you take him the right way, even the much-libelled cowboy is a companionable creature. But to return to the narrative, Tom and Harry were sawing cordwood by the lovely Cheemainus Bay, and I was bound for Alberni in search of fresh pastures there.

My feet, I distinctly recollect, had been sorely tried by the shingle ballast of the Dunsmuir railroad track, along which, from lack of funds, I enjoyed the sensation of striding from sleeper to sleeper on the open trestle bridges which

span the many ravines. From these you can see the dark water thundering far beneath, and realise between each step that, should you miss the narrow timber, there is nothing between you and the boulders, perhaps a hundred feet below. It is also interesting to speculate what would happen should one meet a train, and I once heard the story of a man who caught on the centre swarmed down a tie-rod to escape destruction and could not get up again, but sat jammed against a trestle twelve hours in terror until a plucky engineer came to the rescue.

In any case, I was hardly fit for another fifty-mile journey, and it was with deep disgust I found the narrow trail to Alberni had been repaired by strewing it with small boulders from the beach. These galled my bleeding feet cruelly, the straps of the heavy pack ate raw places into my shoulders, but such trifles do not count in a rough country through much of which the only means of transport is the human back. The British Columbian is great at "packing," and will cheerfully walk off with a keg of flour over a mountain; indeed, new-comers are told that, if he does not approve

of the situation of his house, he will make a vigorous effort and, snail-like, pack it somewhere else. But there was no escape, for that road ran a narrow tunnel driven through the coniferous forest, huge redwoods, cedars, and balsams towering on either hand in an endless vista of stately trunks with their mighty branches interlaced above. Beneath grew rank bracken over seven feet high, a maze of flowering bushes, and a network of fallen logs, through which scarcely a timber-wolf could have forced a passage. Also in places the path consisted of half-trees flung into what seemed a bottomless swamp, where giant water-plants grew up from depths of bubbling mud. Still it must be remembered the writer describes the state of things some few years ago. There have been auriferous discoveries in that region since, and it may be very different now.

But there was another side of the medal, which for a time at least raised one far above the sense of physical discomfort. The scent of countless flowers mingled with the fragrance of the firs, and through openings now and then

I caught visions of almost unearthly beauty. Framed by mighty cedar trunks, with cornice and curtain of red-barked branches and whispering needles, lay pictures beyond the power of brush or pen to feebly portray—breadths of glittering water studded with pine-clad islands sleeping upon a sunlit sea, and behind them rank beyond rank of mountains and a line of eternal snow. This was the Cascade Range across the Straits of Georgia a hundred miles away, lifting itself in lonely majesty against a blue transparency of crystalline atmosphere, fittingly cut off also from all things terrestrial by strata of silvery vapour. Once I rested, awed and held still by excess of grandeur, beside the roots of an arrowhead, among whose snowy clusters a cloud of gorgeous humming birds, green, and gold, and purple, flashed athwart the filtering rays like living jewels.

But my feet were bleeding, and I was hungry; so, taking up the heavy pack, I plodded on again, thanking a kindly Providence there was no more shingle, and I had now a space of root-barred mould to flounder upon. The long miles dragged by while the

sun sank down, driving radiant arrows here and there between the columnar trunks to paint some forest giant gold and vermillion. Also myriads of insects lifted up their voices, and when a solemn dimness settled down upon the conifers I looked for a place to pass the night. This was found presently, the deserted hut of a rancher; and, as there are many such dwellings, it may not be superfluous to explain their presence.

When a poor man takes up timber-land he does a daring thing, for in this province it is covered with huge conifers, often two hundred feet in height and twenty in circumference. These he must hew down painfully, saw into logs and burn, and after twelve months' labour may clear an acre. Even then the soil will grow little for years to come, and if it did there is no one to sell the produce to, so he lives on salmon and venison and trusts a beneficent Government to employ him road-cutting or surveying during the summer. Then trails often leading to nowhere are hewn through the bush, to be grown up again three months later. Also expeditions wander, occasionally

half starved, through the snow-barred ranges, and whatever the future good may be, in the meantime the settler gets his two dollars a day, with which he finds himself in food through the winter. And so his work continues, and by slow gradations the virgin forest is turned into a fertile province. Nevertheless, it sometimes happens there is a talk of economy and road-making is stopped, when the unhappy rancher is driven out in search of sustenance, and, returning finds the forest has invaded his clearing again, though he does not always return. If he is married, the woman is left behind, often in awful solitude throughout the dreary winter, when for weeks together only the hungry timber-wolves pass her dwelling. But many a faithful woman has done her part in the building up of the wide Dominion.

The hut was roughly built of logs, the roof had fallen in, and it stood desolate on the sloping side of a fern-filled gulley. There was a tinkle of falling water from a hidden stream below, the tall pines around loomed out blackly against the dying light, with here and there a pale star appearing dimly on the blue. I

lighted a fire of resinous branches, opened a can of peaches, and proceeded to boil some tea in an empty meat-tin which possesses the property of turning that liquid inky, besides imparting a curious flavour thereto. As I ate, a little wood-deer flitted shyly among the fern, until at an incautious move it vanished in flying bounds, after which, spreading my blankets, I lay down, as I hoped, to sleep. But the mosquitoes came upon me in thirsty myriads, legions of red ants invaded my garments, and it was long before I sank into broken slumber. I was wakened suddenly by a dismal howl, and, sitting up, heard it repeated shrilly from among the sombre firs. Next a long "Yow-yow-yowl" came ringing through the hush of the forest, and, clutching the rifle, I staggered to my feet. That was the voice of the timber-wolves seeking their prey by night, and I had strong objections to forming their supper. So, remembering the grizzly stories I had heard from men who had dwelt in the wilderness between Mattawa and Hudson's Bay, I jammed a cartridge into the Marlin chamber, and then crouched in the

doorway with another in my teeth, wondering, while the cold perspiration started, if the place would stand a siege.

If it had been ghostly in the twilight, it was very much more so then. The wall of pines rose weirdly against the silent night, and I fancied I heard fierce creatures rustling stealthily among the undergrowth. Once I caught a pair of eyes glittering like stars from an opening in the fern, and, pitching up the Marlin, fired at a venture. A red flash leapt from the muzzle, smoke blew into my face, and the sound was flung repeated from trunk to trunk, while through the silence that followed I could hear the leaves pattering. Half an hour later the distressful noise returned, and I fear I shook my fist in the air and abused the wolves aloud, for in that crushing loneliness it seemed a relief to shout. Then minutes that seemed half-hours dragged endlessly by, and I sat still, drenched in dew, clenching the rifle, and trying not to shiver each time the wolves hailed one another. At last a faint grey light filtered down among the massy trunks, brightening slowly until arrowhead and bracken took shape and

form again. Thereupon I bundled my pack together, and ran for my life, until I brought up from utter exhaustion.

Now the early sunlight was glinting among the pines, and when I had lighted a fire and put the meat-tin on, I scrambled down the hollow of a rock-walled gorge, through which a sparkling stream foamed over shelves of blue grit veined with milky quartz. Maidenhair fern grew out of the crannies even then two feet high, and festoons of flowering bushes drooped towards the glancing water. So I plunged from the golden sunlight down into the crystal depths of an eddying pool, and came back refreshed a little to a Spartan meal. Then, in spite of over-fatigue, there was the pack to be shouldered, and torturing boots to don, and for hours together I scrambled among mud and fir roots through the dimness of a silent forest. Next the trail changed from bad to awful, and as I clawed a way up slopes of sliding shale, climbing painfully into a gateway of the mountains, the rain came down, wrapping woods and towering peaks in one grey curtain. The pathway changed to a

torrent, my well-worn garments clung about the worse worn limbs, every joint was aching, and still leagues of awful road divided me from shelter in the hamlet of Alberni. That was also the fifth day of toilsome march, and now the pitiless deluge seemed to wash my last strength away; so, half-asleep from weariness, I struggled on despondently, reeling across the road.

Then, when, as it were, at the last gasp, there opened up beneath me in a deep rift of the mountains a lonely lake. How beautiful it was I could hardly realise then, for my head was swimming, and I chiefly wondered whether a night passed in pools of water under the dripping fern would leave me with sufficient force to make a start again. But—a glorious sight—there were white tents below, and a spiral of blue smoke curling from a cedar shanty. Walking like one asleep, I managed to reach them, and stood dripping among a group of stalwart men who were trying to find dry places for their saws and axes. They asked no questions, for the Western rancher's welcome is as free as the Arab's, but some one gently

shoved me into the shanty, where an ample meal was smoking on the split-board table. It probably consisted of big lake trout, blue grouse, and venison, but I scarcely knew what I ate, for part seemed to choke me and require copious draughts of tea, though the man beside me, whose brawny chest and shoulders had burst his coarse blue shirt, heaped things continually upon my bent tin plate. Presently I told the story of the wolves with graphic details, and, instead of admiration, saw that most of the company struggled to suppress their merriment. Then one said, smiling—and I noticed the refinement in his speech—

"You will know better next time. Timber-wolves are bad in Northern Ontario, and sometimes dangerous along the Peace River, but perfectly harmless in Vancouver Island, where they swarm. But that's not the question; we are chopping a trail here, and have plenty of meat, so you'll camp and rest yourself just as long as you like."

What followed I did not hear, for my head was nodding, and somebody led me into a tent, where, with dry blankets over me, I sank into

delicious rest on a couch of fragrant twigs. It was probably some hours later when I opened my eyes again, and, staring through the tent door, saw the rain had ceased, and the white mist was rolling backward off the lake. A stretch of still, black water lay under the mountain walls, which rose above it pine-clad almost vertically until the climbing trees gave place to smooth-scarped, steely rock that was presently lost again in eddying vapour. High above this towered a line of snow, and lake and camp and forest lay still in the hush of evening, save that an unseen river was calling hoarsely. Then I lapsed into sleep again, and it was high noon when I awakened.

My hosts, I found, were men whose antecedents had been very different—ex-seamen, doctors, bankrupt timber-cutters, and cleaned-out wheat-growers from the prairies. Now each lived on his holding, laboriously clearing it, and, by working a space upon that road, could continue uninterrupted the rest of the year. This was not because of high pay, but that their wants were few, while most things they needed could be made with their own

hands. Sober, athletic, contented, owing no man anything, and working their own land, each day's labour was so much towards the building up of a great country, and also a little towards the perfecting of a finer type of humanity. At least so the writer always found them and their kind, though he regrets his admiration does not extend equally to all the inhabitants of the Western city. Thus it was with grateful thanks and mutual good will I took leave of them, and trudged on again along the straight-hewn track they had made towards Alberni.

CHAPTER VII

THE PIT-LIGHT SHOOTING

"MAN," said Andrew Elliot, "ye're a timid creature, losing your breath yon way over a wee bit coo;" and for response I pointed indignantly to a savage, bellowing object half-seen among the fern.

"I'll sort her," Andrew added. "She's shamefully wasting the good potatoes," and grasping a pikel he strode away across the clearing.

I stood under the trellis of his little frame dwelling, which was covered with honeysuckle originating in a cutting sent six thousand miles from North Britain, and stood above the blue Kleescoot Lake which winds among the mountains ten miles from Alberni. Alberni was then a broken-down, six-house hamlet—it is a rising city now, and Andrew was known to its inhabitants as a bit of a character. His story

was perhaps most eloquently told at a certain memorable dinner given to an emigration deputation by leading citizens of Nanaimo. Then each in turn, rising, told how he had walked into the promised land with nothing, and now owned mines and houses, or had founded a bank. As a rule, however, the speaker abstained discreetly from explaining just how he acquired these things, but left the audience to conclude it was by the practice of honest industry. Last of all came Andrew, who had never lost what he called his Doric, and a trick of straightforward speech.

"And I came in withoot a cent, fifteen years ago," he said, and a murmur of applause went round, which died suddenly as he continued, "I was sairly over-honest for the cities, an' so I tried the bush instead. For fifteen years I wrought an' wrought, an'—here he leaned forward confidentially—I have not a cent the noo, forby some weary timber-land that will not grow anything."

As my informant said, that was the speech of the evening, but Andrew was not popular henceforward in Nanaimo. Neither was he

requested to testify before any further deputations.

So I leaned against the trellis in the little clearing hewn four-square out of virgin forest, listening to the drowsy roar of a distant fall while a cluster of painted humming-birds hovered on invisible wings overhead. Meantime, Andrew marched boldly towards the cow which, to his fierce indignation, was pawing up the good potatoes recklessly, until there was a sudden change in the manner of attack. Andrew came flying towards me, without the pikel, scrambling through the fern in fear of his life, while with lowered head and bronze bell clattering, behind there charged a bull. He shouted something frantically which I could not catch, and there ensued an exciting race for a big balsam stump. Now, when clearing land in British Columbia, the settler generally hews the trees down from a platform some five feet above the roots, which, if unusually energetic, he afterwards grubs out, or more often leaves them to rot instead. Thus in most clearings there are rows of these shoulder-high stumps, and with the bull three feet behind him

the runner, grasping the top of one, dragged himself aloft. Then the pursuer circled round and round, bellowing furiously, while I sat down and laughed.

When he recovered breath a little, Andrew suggested I should drive the beast away, a wee bit rap on the muzzle, and the thing would be done, he said, but I had sufficient sense to answer that being nearer he should do it himself. So Andrew sat on the tree-stump, and the bull waited below, until to his disgust our neighbour Schultz came out of a narrow trail. The latter inquired ironically what he was doing there, and Andrew, making the best of it, answered with a laugh, "Enjoying the cool o' the evening an' watching the cattle."

Thereupon, proceeding circumspectly, we drove the bull away, or rather the other man did, for I did not pose as an authority on the habits of half-wild cattle. It may further be mentioned briefly that in the British Columbia bush, owing to the scanty clearings, hay is very scarce, so that it is with difficulty enough can be gathered to feed a few head through the winter. Therefore the stock run wild all

summer, hunting their own food among the undergrowth, because in many places there is no natural grass, with the result that to find the working oxen generally means a day's journey. So we released Andrew, and afterwards proceeded to fill two little flat lamps with seal-oil and fix them in our hats, because we were going pit-lighting or deer-stalking in the dark, which is a somewhat arduous sport for the novice. Deer had been scarce that season, and, although a close time is officially proclaimed, the settlers throughout the year live much on venison. Then exchanging banter with Schultz, who sarcastically begged us to be merciful as he had some horses running in the bush, we brushed on down the usual tunnel under huge conifers, scrambling shoulder-deep through dew-sprinkled bracken, or tearing our hardly used garments among other undergrowth.

Green dimness filled the walled-up trail, and in the stillness that seemed accentuated by the buzz of insect wings I could almost fancy I heard a great pulse throbbing through the myriad growing things. Scarcely even in the

steamy tropics is the force of vegetation made so clearly manifest as in the damp, warm climate of British Columbia west of the Cascade Range, where, except in California, grow the tallest trees in the world. Besides, it is almost all forest, from the harsh grass of the river swamps to the snow-line of the lofty ranges; for take a kaleidoscopic mixture of glacier, lake, and pinewood, awful thousand-feet cañons, and thundering rivers, Switzerland and Norway mingled and magnified, and you have a rough impression of British Columbia.

It was dusk when we came out into a narrow clearing by a calling river, where we heard the thud of a big axe among the conifers, and saw two sinewy athletes labouring in haste to finish a cedar-bark shanty. This primitive erection, somewhat resembling an exaggerated beehive, leaned as it were wearily against a hemlock, not far from a pile of feathery embers which had been a house until an incipient forest fire chanced to pass that way. One of those who worked there, resting, while the sweat dripped from him, on his axe, told as nearly as I can remember the following story :—

Walter Leven had been a schoolmaster in Montreal, and why he left that fair city was his own affair, though being a man of hot temper, rumour had it he told some inspection committee to go to perdition, which increased his popularity among the free ranchers. In any case, he had lived four years as a rancher, and, my informant stated, had lost two houses already by fire, which is not an uncommon accident in the Vancouver bush. But Leven had some small means, so he paid for help at the land clearing, and, having gathered a band of stock which sold well in Victoria, and working six months raised another dwelling, went East, exultant, to bring back the woman who had patiently waited. Also just two days ago, so the narrator concluded, "A blamed fire must come along and clean that house right out, so we're trying to fix them until he builds another. They'll be coming in over the trail now, and we've had to rustle."

Under Andrew's caustic directions all set to work again, and half an hour later when the shanty looked less like a poultry-house, sat down with streaming faces to await Leven's

coming. Soon the soft tramp of unshod hoofs came out of a shadowy aisle, and a man, half-dragging a weary horse, limped into the red glow of the fire we made. A woman in dusty, dew-draggled dress leaned forward in her saddle from utter weariness, and there clattered about her a curious load of kitchen utensils. Three thousand miles by C.P.R. she had travelled in a Colonist car, another weary journey to Nanaimo in an unseaworthy steamer among Chinese labourers, and from there for two days had plodded down the trail to find only a circle of ashes where her home should have been.

"Hard luck, Walter!" said the tall man with the axe. "But you've got to show your grit and make the best of it, and all the crowd from Sproat Lake to Alberni will start in and fix you up. Besides, if Mrs. Leven wants anything, she has only to ask for it."

Then he took his hat off to the lady, and edged back out of the firelight with a half-bashful bow. He was a rough timber-cutter reared in the forests of Northern Ontario, and yet there was something in voice and gesture

which was beyond mere courtesy. What Leven said does not matter, and it was scarcely eloquent; but when he lifted her from the horse the woman turned a troubled face towards the other, and I saw her eyes were full as she spoke a few words of fervent gratitude. Then with a half-choked sob she leaned upon her husband's shoulder, and the pair went slowly into the shanty.

"Hard on the poor woman!" said Andrew as we moved away. "Weel reared down East I heard say—it's a rough home-coming for a bride from the city."

Presently from under an avenue of mighty cedars I caught a glimpse of the Kleescoot Lake, and though I lived beside it afterwards for many happy weeks, I like best to think of it as I saw it then. A steely glitter of starlight slept reflected in the dim, black water. Ghostly trains of mist were creeping about the pines ashore, and above them dusky masses of rigid foliage climbed the mountain-side towards the cold white line silhouetted far away against the indigo. And catching the glow from the north-west, which would hang there almost

until the dawn, one snow-peak still shimmered with orange and purple. Again it was past description, and there was something in the stillness which spoke invitingly of infinite solitude. Then I began to understand the influence of the woods, which grows stronger and stronger in the heart of many a rancher until when at last the long-expected railroad or mining rush comes he disregards the ready market for all that he can grow, and disposing of his holding to the first offerer, pushes on again into the wilderness. What the charm is no one exactly knows, and yet its power is very real. Perhaps, too, those men are right who, turning their backs upon the offer of prosperity, leave the noisy bustle of the mushroom city for the silence of the primeval bush. Strife, chicanery, petty jealousy, vice and tawdry pride of place, melt away and vanish before the breath of the mountains, and the man who dwells among them, often without knowing it, increases in depth of thought and dignity as he goes back nearer to nature. But there are degrees in this also, and a limit which it is good for but few to pass; for here,

as in Africa, now and then one may see in the settlements a being upon whom too much loneliness has set a mark dividing him from his fellow-men.

Then I remember a loon sent its shrill cry ringing across the still black lake, a cry that breaks through the night laden with unearthly mournfulness, and I shivered a little as I followed Andrew down another trail.

"It's Marvin's swamp we'll try first," he said. "Marvin was foolish, so instead of clearin' forest, he wrought five years tryin' to drain this swamp. Twice a spate just sopped up the earth dam he built, and it took him a twelvemonth to make another; but he hung on and fought fair for the useless quagmire that broke his heart at last, for Marvin fell into evil ways—and set up as a land agent. I'm no sayin' there are not honest men in that business, but ye might get tired before ye found them."

Andrew was partly right, for the average Western land agent's ways are devious, and it is currently reported that he would sell his grandmother. In any case, he is generally able to provide the guileless new-comer with

exactly what he desires: sawing lumber, minerals, with specimens thrown in, or the finest fruit soil in the Dominion—and all on the same land. It was an hour later when, drenched through with dew, we reached Marvin's swamp, a quaggy oblong lying in a hollow of the mountains, with black pines climbing above it up the steep hillside. There was also a half-moon sinking towards them in the west, and by the dim light we made a hasty reconnaissance. A creek wandered through the centre, sunk down in a six-foot trench which had cost Marvin two years' labour. Slimy cuttings of unknown depth zig-zagged everywhere, and meeting above them were sickly willows, while the drier portion was covered with tangled timothy grass and sprinkled by rotting trunks. So I foresaw with misgivings we should have an experience there, blundering when the moon had gone among many pitfalls. Then we retired to a deserted dwelling which was being absorbed again by the forest, for a maple's branches were already wrenching off the roof, and the lean-to kitchen was filled with willows.

Here we made ready the pit-lights, fixing a shield of metal cut out of a coal-oil tin over the brim of our hats. Arranged so, when a man stands upright the flame is shaded from both face and person, and there remains only a flickering light, apparently unsupported some six feet in the air, while when one chances on it wandering through the midnight bush it is highly desirable to call out loudly, lest a whirring bullet may answer the first rustle. Now the wood-deer is an inquisitive creature, and when he sees anything unusual feels impelled to investigate it. Also it is almost necessary to wear a suit of armour when stalking him through the bush, so, as he delights to rob the clearings at night, pit-light shooting is a common amusement, although it has its drawbacks, as will appear.

By and by when the moon had gone, and save for the clear stars shining above the high forest there was black darkness, we proceeded with much caution to creep across the swamp. The first thing I did of moment was to fall through a screen of grasses into a six or seven-foot drain, and I remember the sickening

feeling when, instead of meeting firm ground, my foot sank into empty air, and with a flounder I dropped into blackness below. The mire sucked bubbling to my knees, and clawing at the slimy bank I only drove one arm in past the elbow, while a snake or some other creature wriggled near my side. Then, and it was a welcome sight, the light of Andrew's pit-lamp appeared overhead, and shouting excitedly I stretched out the Marlin muzzle. Andrew, however, had been born in North Britain, and replied with caution, "First ye'll snap the cartridge out o' the chamber; I would not like ye to shoot me by accident. Man, cannot ye keep quiet, scarin' the deer o' the countryside with a useless fuss like that."

Then there was a heave and a scramble, and mud-plastered, but thankful, I reached the upper air again. Next, even while my companion made observations on the need for caution, he tripped upon a rotting stump, and lurching headfirst over, went down with a heavy crash upon the other side, doubling up the tin shield and extinguishing the lamp. We spent another ten minutes in straightening things up,

and then after cruelly scoring one leg from ankle to knee and falling into another hole I declined resolutely to go any further. I had come out for amusement, not to kill myself, I said, and even Andrew admitted that to fall into the mire-clogged main creek might result in drowning. So chalking the rifle muzzles we sat down on a fallen pine and waited.

An owl flitted half-visible above our heads, a loon's wild wail came faintly from the distant river, and a little night breeze set the black pines whispering. This lasted half an hour at least, and then there was a crackling among the undergrowth, a thud of hoofs on soft earth as a wood deer cleared some obstacle in a ten-foot bound, and Andrew, touching my shoulder, rose quietly upright. Something was moving towards us through the dimness; we could hear the wet timothy switching upon its hide, and my heart beat faster when I made out what seemed several points of pale green flame glinting through a grove of willows. These were the eyes of the deer, but whether luminous of themselves or sparkling with reflected light I could not say, and I have heard the question

argued without result by the ranchers. One pair drew apart from the rest, halted, and came on again as it were suspiciously, and now my companion trod hard upon my toes. We could see no other trace of the deer, only hear its hoofs sucking in the oozy mould, but when Andrew jerked his head it came on faster. Then I caught the glint of his rifle barrel, and checking the tremor in my arm, slid the left hand forward and pitched the Marlin to my shoulder. There was a blurr of whiteness where a ray touched the muzzle, but trying to use the weapon like a gun by instinct of direction I disregarded this, and trusting to the balance squeezed the trigger. A glare of brightness dazzled my eyes, and there followed a second flash. Something hot touched my cheek and smoke curled into my eyes, but I heard neither report, only a floundering among the timothy, with a click of hoofs and patter of leaves as the remaining deer, unscathed, swept off through the bush.

Scrambling forward I found Andrew bending over a struggling deer, with a red knife in his hand, until the noise ended in a soft gurgle,

and I knew the victim had received the *coup de grace.* By the uncertain light of the little lamps we performed what the French Canadian calls the "eventrer," because otherwise the flesh would be watery. After this, carrying the carcase in case there were wolves about, we went back to the house, and I saw that between mud and gore Andrew presented an unseemly spectacle, and took his word for it that I was even worse. For half an hour or so we fought the mosquitoes and red ants, then, trusting the scare would be over, tore ourselves grievously crossing the swamp again. This time, in spite of protests, Andrew insisted on patrolling the edge of the forest, rebuking me for outbursts of language when I walked into the barked branches of many fallen firs. But at last we heard a creature, a big one it seemed to me, moving through the underbrush, and stood still on catching the green glimmer of further eyes.

Up went the Marlin, and Andrew's Winchester flashed almost simultaneously, while through the jarring of the report I heard one ball whirr across the forest, and another sound, the thud of a heavy bullet crunching through

bone and muscle. This time, to judge from the noise, we had brought down an elephant, and with due caution, because there might be panthers about, I let Andrew go first. Thus his repeater flashed again, and the echoes had died away before, after getting tangled among the fern, I joined him. He was leaning disconsolately on the smoking rifle, and in reply to a question answered fiercely, "No, it isn't a buffalo, nor yet a menagerie. Can ye no stop your foolish joking—it's Walter Leven's coo!"

So, failing to realise at first the financial aspect, I sat down and laughed immoderately, while Andrew alternately abused me and Walter Leven for not hanging a bell upon his cow. He stopped for want of breath at last, concluding ruefully, "This tale will be told against me all over the country, and there's no a liar in three settlements that will not add to it."

Then, to make the best of a misfortune, there was further butcher work to be done, and for four days afterwards we hawked the remains of Leven's cow on horseback between two trail-cutters' camps and the settlement, parting with the meat at what retailers call an alarming

sacrifice. Leven had also a good many things to say, and Andrew winced under his compliments, but he placed a fair value on the beast, so that the night's amusement cost us each some ten dollars. It was dawn when we left Marvin's swamp with scored limbs and faces swollen by mosquito bites, while the first rays of the rising sun swinging up from the dew-bathed forest smote a golden track across the misty lake as I paddled, in search of horses, to the nearest ranch.

CHAPTER VIII

THE SALMON FISHING

SOME time after slaying Leven's cow, Tom and I and Harry Easton lay camped, one still, clear night beside the frothing Kleescoot River. This stream also rejoices in the less euphonious name of Sproat, though most of the settlers preferred its Indian appellative, while as the history of Alberni, which stands upon it, resembles that of other settlements on the Pacific slope, it may be briefly told. In the old days some forty years ago, when gold-seekers of many nations were pouring into the new El Dorado called Caribou, two Scotchmen with energy and capital went up instead into the Vancouver woods. There they started a saw-mill, sending cargoes of lumber to China over-seas, and lake and river took the name they bore. So a town promised to spring up on

the site of the Siwash rancheries, and there was the usual speculation over a new city until the lumber trade failed. Then its inhabitants went back disgusted, the saw-mill rotted, and the future city lapsed into forest again. But a few settlers held on, and for long years hard-up adventurers and patient Mongolians washed out a little gold from the bed of China creek, and such was the state of Alberni at the time we camped near it. Next, as an instance of the uncertain ways of fate, the year after we left it some one dug a foot or two deeper, and found payable gold. Other rich strikes followed almost immediately, so now Alberni flourishes, promising after all to become a city. Throughout Oregon, Washington, and British Columbia one may find every here and there deserted towns where the deer feed in the willow-choked streets, while unhappy investors anathematise their names.

But all this is irrelevant matter, and we had foregathered beside the Kleescoot River to earn a livelihood if we might by preserving salmon. A faint blue spiral of wood-smoke curled lazily from our crackling fire, and hung in aromatic

wreaths about the wall of forest beyond the shingle, which was matted by fruit-bearing creepers, while little blood-red wine-berries made blotches of vivid colour against the boulders. To the north and westward the usual fires of green and crimson flickered behind the pines, whose rigid branches were thrown out black as ebony, for the sunsets in British Columbia are surpassingly glorious. There was, of course, a heavy fragrance of balsam and cedar, a buzzing of myriad insects, and, alas! the song of mosquitoes too, while now and then from far off the cat-like cry of a panther came down from the wooded heights. A string of splendid sea-trout hung from the ridge-pole, where the fish-loving minks or chipmunks could not come and steal them, while we lay on the warm shingle chatting languidly as darkness closed down.

"Better than shovelling coal," said Tom, "on that beastly Naimo wharf, or holding one's own by force of arms in a construction shanty. Well, you never know your luck, and I'm wondering what this last move will do. Harry, if your friends had seen you, blacker

than any nigger, clawing lumps of coal I should say they'd be startled."

Easton laughed a little before he crawled into the tent, and, leaving Tom, I followed presently. Then, instead of discarding garments, I put further ones on, because the nights were cold, and sank into oblivion on a couch of scented twigs, which, if properly prepared, exceeds in luxurious comfort any production of the upholsterer's art. At 5 a.m. next morning all went down headforemost into a sparkling pool, and later attacked with appetite a simple breakfast. There was fish, and venison whose fibres resembled boot-laces, flapjacks made from flour and water, cindery outside and raw dough within, and of course that compound of glucose, molasses, and flavoured gum which is sold all over the Dominion under the name of "drips." Next, scrambling under the dew-beaded pines, we proceeded to a whirling pool beneath a fall which was black with a run of Steelhead salmon.

It is perhaps no news to many that almost every stream in British Columbia abounds with

salmon, which in some even impede the light-draught steamers by piling up bars of gravel about the spawning beds. Strange to say, although when swarming landwards towards the river mouths the fish may be taken with a trolling spoon, once in fresh water they refuse every kind of lure, and are only killed by net, or spear, or wheel. Also, when they ascend a crystal stream the greater portion perish after spawning, so that in autumn their carcasses are piled up on the banks of every pool, and Indians gather the rotting mass to sell to the settlers. No other fertiliser will grow such crops as this. On the other hand, in the muddy waters of the larger rivers, which are stained a dark green by the glacial clay, few dead fish may be found, which seems to show that too much purity is not good for salmon. There are also many varieties, but perhaps those known locally as the Steelheads, Sockeyes, and Chinook are the most numerous. The first resembles the British salmon, though I seldom saw one much over twenty pounds; the second grows thicker and deeper; and the great Chinook, or "King" fish, is, roughly speaking,

more like a tench in shape, and runs, so the settlers say, as large as eighty pounds. Any way, I once carried a couple which were almost more than I could lift.

With characteristic kindliness Andrew Elliot was there to help, and soon we stood in the spray of the spouting fall ready to begin. Under the whispering cedars, ringed about with mossy rock, the black eddy swept round and round thick with dusky shadows which seemed shouldering one another out of the water. Now and then a silvery flashing broke the surface of the pool, and some half-dozen Steelheads flung themselves in glittering bent bows at the fall, to leap upwards from every pool behind a jutting fang, or, overpowered by the rush of water, to flounder badly hammered into the pool again. But the salmon is a plucky fish, so without cessation the struggle went on, score after score of shapely creatures vanquishing the stream.

Grasping a Siwash spear, I stood intent and eager upon a spire of rock. The cedar pole I balanced was probably twenty feet long, and at its lower end bore two forked sockets. On

these were loosely fixed a couple of deer-bone barbs skilfully fashioned by the Indians, and a sinew lanyard connected them to the pole. Andrew held a similar weapon, while Tom and Harry had ruder implements in the shape of a rough iron hook lashed to a branch, which is what the settler generally uses, though the Indian fish-spear is much more merciful. Round and round beneath me swept a shoal of blue-grey backs. The hurrying, glancing water dazzled my eyes, and I waited with nerves tingling from excitement until Andrew shouted, "Noo!" Then I drove the spear forward, and missed, also lost my balance, and would next moment have been rolling among the boulders, but that laughing Andrew grabbed my shoulder.

The second thrust was more successful, for a quiver along the slender rod told that the barbs had struck a fish, and driven overhead in the firm flesh they slipped off the sockets, as they were intended to do. Thus the captive was held by the sinew lanyard, and if any one fancies it is easy to lift out a fighting salmon at the end of a bending wand when perched upon

a moss-smoothed pinnacle they have only to try it. But the fish was landed, and Andrew with a billet tapped it on the head, then set to work in earnest, leaving me to my own devices. The fun grew fast and furious, for the salmon at times seemed jammed together, and I presently acquired some degree of skill, while Tom and Harry did fearful execution with the iron hooks. These, however, often tore through the flesh, and apparently confirmed the theory that fish cannot feel pain as animals do. Often we saw a big one, whose shoulder rent wide open showed white through the water, repeatedly charge the fall or ascend in graceful bounds when it should have been helpless from agony. The bank was soon covered with gleaming fish, and then there came an interlude.

Tom struck at a salmon, and, missing it, disappeared suddenly into the eddy, which sucked him down. Then he came up choking almost beneath the fall, and I held my breath as I watched him swinging his left arm like a flail to avoid being swept under. Next, half-hidden in foam, he was hurled down the white-

streaked rush towards the tail of the pool, and came back sideways with the swing of the eddy. I reached out the salmon spear, and he broke the butt off it, while, as I prepared to follow, Andrew, saying coolly, "Stay where ye are, ye idiot, there would only be two fools to worry over instead of one," "klepped" him, so he called it, with the iron hook through the back of his jacket, and there followed an exciting minute before he was landed.

"I've played a sea-trout," said Harry, "on a gossamer trace, "but I never played a man before, and if you had been a two-pounder you couldn't have made a better fight," but Tom did not answer, being far too busy coughing up water. Afterwards the fishing went on uneventfully, for the salmon were passing as thickly as ever, and before it was finished we had some seventy on the bank, varying from sixteen to twenty-five pounds I think, which was due to their numbers and not to our skill. What followed was by no means dainty work, but it had to be done, and by sunset our appearance defied description, for we were reddened to the ankles, besides being plastered

all over with scales and sundries. Meantime, other fishers had been hard at work, for great white-headed eagles and circling hawks hovered above the rapids on harshly beating wings, to plunge now and then like a gannet into a shallow, or swoop with a shrill scream upon some unfortunate salmon which had been crowded ashore. Then the feathered angler rose again out of a burst of spray with a struggling fish in its talons, which if held fore and aft he bore off in triumph to the top of a stately cedar, where, so Andrew said, he would hoard it until the flesh was high. If, on the other hand, the prey was seized sideways by claws too close together, leaving part of its back behind, it would splash into the pool, and proceed apparently none the worse to launch itself at the fall. Also lines of meaner fowls stood perched on the boulders, waiting perhaps for the eagles' leavings, while little bright-eyed mink were scurrying everywhere on the chance of being able to steal.

The split fish were slightly sun-dried, and next, under Andrew's directions, we arranged the smoking-house, loose sheets of cedar-bark

leaning in a circle against a hemlock, and, with the salmon hung up inside it, we piled heaps of damp bark and fern about. That took a whole day's labour, and when, in the evening, it was lighted, Andrew said, "I'll come round the morn and further advise ye. It's no a difficult matter when one is used to it, but ye'll maybe spoil a few hunner before ye get into it."

Andrew was right, although when towards midnight I went out for a last look at the fire, the damped-down pile was smouldering just as it ought to do. A dense cloud of acrid smoke rolled slowly across the bush, and there was probably a dearth of mosquitoes for fully a mile to lee, so I sank contented into peaceful slumber. Harry awakened me at sunrise by a boot-heel in the ribs, saying wrathfully, "Fourteen hours work yesterday—just come and look at it," after which there was a dismal growl from Tom. I went, and saw that while we slept a little breeze had sprung up, and fanning the smouldering heap into flame had utterly wiped out the result of our labours, for there were only feathery ashes where the cedar-bark had been,

while a few charred objects were all that remained of the salmon.

Thereupon we argued the question as to who was responsible, and after losing our tempers, arrived at no result, until Tom concluded, "We're pitiful fools, the whole of us, so instead of talking for ever we had better start in again. I can fancy what Andrew will say when he comes along."

But Andrew, cautious by nature, would not commit himself, and only sat down on a boulder with a little laugh, while if memory serves me right his comment was, "I'm no saying I did not expect this."

CHAPTER IX

AN UNSUCCESSFUL VENTURE

"IT'S an evil tempered an' trying beast, but ye cannot expect a high-class horse for the sum o' eight dollars," said Andrew Elliot, as he drew cautiously clear of the hoofs of a Cayuse pony which he had purchased for us from an Indian. Harry, so Tom said afterwards, was hiding behind a pine, and he himself remarking that he was not insured declined to take an active part in the proceedings, though from a safe place he gave us much excellent advice. If in these days malignant spirits do not inhabit men, which seems somewhat doubtful to judge by the newspapers, they apparently find congenial quarters in many horses, and when we approached it the one in question seemed all teeth and hoofs.

Notwithstanding several failures, we had at last prepared a stock of dried salmon, and in

spite of rather than aided by the beast, it was my part to carry it to Alberni for shipment. So after various mishaps, and several nasty kicks, we hung a couple of loaded bags over the animal's back, which it immediately endeavoured to scrub off against a tree until I held the halter while Andrew thrashed it vigorously with a ten-foot pole. As a result it bolted for the bush, trailing me behind, while Andrew running thrust the pole into my hand, saying as he did so, "Better take this with ye, maybe ye'll want it."

That first eight-mile journey was like a nightmare, for the Cayuse fouled the halter and himself among the branches of every fallen tree, fell down on a rock ledge, and once seemed bent on swimming the Somas River, while my shoulders ached from using the pole. Only those who have driven a practically wild Indian pony along a British Columbia trail can fully appreciate the difficulty of the task. To begin with, the average trail is scarcely two feet wide, and zigzags among tangled undergrowth and giant bracken, which is matted across it neck-high every here and there. The

rest is cumbered by fir-roots in a treacherous network, or blocked completely by fallen logs, which are often twenty feet in girth, and lie piled athwart each other in hopeless ruin, when one must hew a way round or painfully wriggle beneath. Still, disgusted and exhausted, I reached Alberni, unloaded the salmon-bags, which were burst in places, and then the whole inhabitants, contrary to my wishes, turned out to see me start. One leg was nearly broken by being rubbed against a fir, the beast made determined efforts to overthrow and trample on me, and then abandoning the attempt to ride I started back for camp amid sarcastic acclamations, towing him behind me at the full scope of the halter.

Even so I had an uncomfortable feeling that he was approaching furtively to bite my shoulder, and the one time he manifested a subdued spirit was when a panther sprang out of the bush. The lithe beast turned and snarled at us before he vanished into the fern again, and the Cayuse resumed the journey a little more quietly. Panthers are fairly common in Vancouver Island, and sometimes hang about

the outside of the small settlements, where their conduct is in nowise marked by timidity. A few weeks earlier a friend was riding down the trail with a young deerhound trotting by his side when one bounded from the underbrush, and ere he could thrust a cartridge into the rifle, had disappeared with a dog almost as large as itself.

The narrator was a truthful man, and his story received full credence, while one incident may be cited which I witnessed myself.

I was lounging with others outside the general store of Alberni, waiting for the mail, and as the outlying settlers generally carried a rifle on the chance of meeting deer or grouse, perhaps a dozen weapons leaned against the rail. A few lean hogs of the razor-backed kind were rooting about the roadway almost under our feet, when suddenly a panther shot out from some matted fern. Several ran for the rifles, but even as the first man flung his up the aggressor and one small hog were gone, while though we searched diligently we could find neither spoor nor blood among the undergrowth. Probably this would not happen in

the centre of Alberni now. For a week the transport went on, and I daily fought pitched battles with "The Terror," as Easton christened the horse, while both my partners declined resolutely to have any dealings with him. Then one fine morning we stood on the little rickety wharf watching the old propeller *Maud* steam down the great rock-walled fiord misnamed the Alberni Canal, bound for Victoria, and carrying our first consignment.

Meantime, Andrew Elliot had got himself constituted postmaster for a neighbouring district where four or five lonely log houses stood on the fringe of an almost unknown wilderness. Doubtless the authorities understood what kind of place it was, but they were ready to accept the first excuse for granting small subsidies to encourage settlers. They might not pay men openly for living on the land, so instead they made them policemen or schoolmasters, and this in districts possessing but two families of children, and where in all probability there never would be culprits. So Andrew received a heavy box containing weights and measures besides many printed

forms, which he flung into a corner among his worn-out boots with the observation that life was far too short to investigate such truck.

As it happened I went with him the first night he carried the mail, and he required assistance because the ranchers had conspired together to play a joke on him. They had ordered seeds and sundries to be sent up from Victoria by parcels post instead of purchasing them at the local store, so a confused heap of boxes were flung out from the stage which weekly made a perilous journey through from Nanaimo, and twice even when I was there, upsetting, broke one passenger's ankle and did something serious to another's shoulder.

"Confound them!" said Andrew wrathfully. "Do they idiots fancy I'm a fast freight train? Weel, I'll make the best of it," and he crammed a dozen letters into the pockets of his canvas overalls, where they reposed doubled up against a blackened pipe and a greasy cake of somebody's unequalled plug. Then we hurled the other packets into a couple of sacks among his monthly supply of kerosene and big lump of raw

venison, and tramped off into the darkness and the driving rain. The trail was ankle-deep in mire which in places rose also to the knees. Cataracts poured down on us from the cedar branches, and when we reached the first powder-keg nailed up to a tree in token that some miles, or leagues, behind it stood a settler's dwelling, it took ten minutes and many observations to light a lamp. Then we found that the brown juice of pulpy tobacco had freely permeated the crumpled letters, but Andrew calmly straightened them with a grimy paw, saying as he did it, "There's nobody worth the reading would write to old Peter. It's a bill maybe, and that doesn't matter," then dropped the mangled epistle into the powder-keg. Subsequently I fell over a fir root and burst the old flour-bag, and there followed a grope in deep mud for the scattered packages, after which we strapped them together with Andrew's suspenders, and her Majesty's Mail went on its way again.

Andrew fired his rifle at the end of a fern-choked trail, and when a man who waited somewhere in the rain came forth he said, "I've a letter for ye, but the Lord kens which it is,"

and by the light of a lantern we debated several minutes over the blurred inscriptions, until my companion settled the matter by a stroke of genius.

"One of that lot's for ye, ye can take your choice," he said. "Here's ten weary packets for Jacques and the Dutchman, too; they're neighbours of ye, and it would be a charity to carry them along."

Thereupon he saddled half the contents of one sack upon the rancher, and we departed suddenly, to avoid his thanks, though I fancied I heard him swearing after us through the rain. And so we proceeded until when we reached his dwelling the postmaster was further puzzled, for there yet remained two packets where none should have been.

"Orchard grass, an' garden seeds, they can wait fine," he said, after making a hole in one. "The ground's ower sodden for sowing they kind noo. Weel, we'll just have supper on the strength of what we've done."

Lest any should wonder, the writer would say that in his time he has carried the mails of her Britannic Majesty, and those of the King of

Spain, on the backs of mules and camels as well as in oil launches and fast steamers. These were sometimes handled in a manner which would have inspired horror in the minds of the chiefs at home, while in case of the Spanish *correo*, which is above all others eccentric, the peasants of one province refrained from using stamps, because, so they averred, the officials would certainly steal them, and charge on delivery again. Once, too, he remembers a dispute that was more than verbal with a drunken official upon the Niger over five bags just landed from England, which the other insisted on returning home. Still, he came upon the most original methods in the remoter woods of British Columbia, all of which is of course an unwarrantable digression.

At length the eagerly expected answer arrived from Victoria, and we read it at the tent door with a sickening sense of fresh disappointment. There was no demand for goods of that kind, the salesman said, but with difficulty he had got a few dollars for it, for the purpose of feeding Chinamen and hogs. However, if we could send good fish salted in barrels

he fancied it might be sold for a little. Tom's face darkened as he unfolded the paltry bill, though I forget exactly what it represented, but having found stump-grubbing a somewhat arduous pastime, we determined to try the salted fish for want of something better. Later we consulted the willing Andrew, who, like most of the ranchers, very seldom refused advice or active help in any difficulty, and again he was able to aid us. Barrels brought in specially would be far too dear, he said, but as luck would have it another man had attempted the same thing a year or two ago, and finding more profitable employment had departed without shipping the last consignment. It still remained on the river-bank, and if we used the barrels no one would interfere, he said, though he added, grinning, he fancied the emptying of them would be "sairly trying."

The three who did it certainly found it so, and I can vividly recall the morning when we stood on the remains of a crumbling wharf evidently built in the palmy days many years ago. Near at hand the crystal river slid into tidewater, and a deep, blue inlet wound west-

wards towards the Pacific through a steep-walled opening in the forest-wrapped hills. The rush of warm wind which swept up it seemed to touch our faces with a saltness from the sea through all the resinous odours of the conifers. But there was another savour decidedly less pleasant, which became accentuated when Tom with a hatchet knocked the head of the first cask in. Then I recoiled backwards, almost sick, and refrain from describing what we saw in the cask. Easton seemed gripped by a spasm, Tom had a lump in his throat, but summoning our courage we emptied it. The next was a little easier, and for three hours we worked on in desperate haste, because we wanted those barrels badly, while this was not the kind of task one would care to linger at.

Then we sank the casks in the stream, and departed feeling we needed a dose of brandy. Afterwards they were filled with clean earth to deodorise, and in due time this was replaced by brine and salmon, and the whole consigned to Victoria. The net result was, however, a dead failure, for the fish being prepared badly, so the

dealer said, the remittance he sent us barely repaid the cost of provisions, and that of the Terror. When Andrew declined to take back the latter on any terms at all Tom presented him gratis with his blessing to a rancher, and we subsequently heard the recipient went about blackening our memory.

CHAPTER X

THE SACKING OF MARSHALL'S CAMP

WE had hired ourselves out timber-cutting when we met ex-officer Mellard again, and he sat before a split-board shanty in the mainland bush, contentedly peeling potatoes with a broken knife. He was brighter-eyed and thinner than when we saw him last making patriotic speeches on board a colonist car, but in spite of the old blue overalls he had not lost the indefinite stamp. Some men instead of sinking under adversity always seem superior to their environment, and our acquaintance was one of these. There were many patches, some of them cut from flour-bags, upon his canvas garments, but they only set off the stalwart figure, and in a land of athletes their wearer stood revealed as equal to any in physique, and yet different. For the rest, he was earning two dollars a day by

cooking for thirty men, because just then it would not have been wise for the contractor to employ too many Chinamen. So a Mongolian assisted, and Mellard took the pay, while another man would have received much abuse as well, but there was something which prevented even the surly Marshall Brothers taking liberties with him.

Their camp stood perched on a hillslope above a certain little town not very far from Vancouver City, which nestled, hemmed in by forests, beside a broad river, and, contrary to the general rule, the senior partner was an unmitigated brute who had already gained an evil name in that district. He came up as we spoke to Mellard, and I remember his greeting was, "More condemnation useless Britishers! What foolish agent was it sent me this kind of truck? Well, can't you get a move on before the flies eat you?"

Tom stared hard at him and I saw his brows contract, but Mellard only laughed, and when the other moved away he said, "I'm afraid you won't find this a comfortable camp. That man is a black-hearted bully, and the rest of the

choppers, besides being already mutinous, are not a high-class set. They are mostly raw Lancashire miners of the kind which is ready with the clogs, driven here by the coal trade slackening in Naimo, and I think there is trouble not very far away. However, perhaps you had better commence and earn your two dollars a day."

"Thanks," said Tom quietly. "We've travelled a hundred miles to get this employment, and we don't intend to be scared off by words from a man like that. Still, I also think there'll be trouble if he talks any more to me."

So Mellard peeled his potatoes while we set to work dragging a grinding cross-cut saw through the felled conifers, then shackling on the oxen hauled or rolled the giant logs towards a skidway to the river, for, against general usage, which is to burn them, these were to be floated to a saw-mill lower down. It was severe and dangerous physical toil, for some of the trunks were five feet in diameter, and had a trick of rolling back on the hand-spikes or hurling them in the air, which threatened to crush the men behind out

of existence. Those who worked about us were mostly, as Mellard had said, young Lancashire miners, capable, perhaps, under different treatment of cheerful work, but now sullen and foul-spoken. Also, much of the time Steven Marshall sat on a log and pointed out their shortcomings with a bitter tongue, while the gang shook their fists at him surreptitiously and muttered curses.

At sunset we went back disgusted to the shanty, and, as Mellard was not a first-rate cook, enjoyed an indifferent meal, after which we sat apart in the clearing as the shadows deepened, and Mellard told us part of his adventures. He had been swindled, as usual, in a land investment, and then found work tending stock on the lower Fraser, which he gave up because, as he said, "The rancher was a gunner who ran from my own ship on this station many years ago. Now he's rich and prosperous, while I am—what I am. I knew him at first glance, though he never recognised me, but the contrast was too impressive, and there was always a lurking fear he might remember. So I left him after some small

difference, and now I'm cooking in the bush for this rabble. Life is a somewhat weary thing, but I suppose it's only justice, and the man who flings the good away must not grumble at the bad."

None of us answered, for we did not know what to say, though I noticed there was sympathy in Tom's open face, and presently we went back with reluctance to the shanty. It was foul with stale tobacco smoke and mingled savours, dirty otherwise also, and clamorous with wild language, and that was the only time in the Dominion my surroundings inspired me with disgust, though once Mellard ejected an offender forcibly by the neck.

About a fortnight later Tom and I were sawing a hemlock down beside the steep skidway, while some half-dozen others were busy with the oxen getting out a log. Below us, and seen through branch-arched tunnels between the columnar trunks which stretched down the hillside in stately colonnades, the river glinted like a silver riband, and across it blue smoke curled lazily over a wooden town. As usual a mountain rampart hung over that, with a

glimmer of whiteness far above the timber line, while shafts of golden radiance beat down upon the fern. A blue grouse was drumming somewhere, and the song of a frothing rapid rose up from the sunlit valley, but man's voice jarred harshly upon nature's harmonies, for Marshall halted a moment to abuse some of the gang, and growling curses followed as he passed on up the skidway. The latter consisted of the rounded edges of smaller trees bedded in the earth for the great trunks to thunder over on their way to the river, and beside us, where the bank sloped sharply in another direction, Marshall, as asked by those who worked below, should have erected a stout log guard. But, for this very reason, he did not do it, and so rendered himself responsible for what followed.

I had loosed the saw a moment to mop my dripping face, when there was a grinding sound higher up in the bush, and a great log came bouncing along the skids. It was probably fifteen feet in girth, and the stout skids smoked and screamed again under its passage. While watching the charging monster it struck me that something would happen if it left its

proper path, so instinctively I stepped behind a tree, and saw it leap apparently several feet in the air as its swinging butt struck some obstacle. Then, canting a little further, it launched itself clear of the skidded track, and plunged like a thunderbolt into the forest. There was a wild yell of warning, and men bolted left and right, a mighty smashing of brushwood, and a sickening crash as it brought up with splintered butt against a boulder. Some one shouted hoarsely there was a man under it, and shivering a little I followed the others through the torn-up undergrowth. Mercifully, as it happened, the man was not beneath the log, but had been struck by some projection on passing and hurled clear with a badly shattered leg. So we found him lying with one hand tearing up the mould, reddened fern all about him, and—for this is what happened—choking wild profanity through his teeth. What could be done we did for him, and then, silent at last, laid him on a litter of branches and blankets, which four comrades lifted just as Marshall came back.

The questions died from his lips as he saw

the savage faces turned towards him, and I remember Mellard, who ran up, shook him fiercely by the shoulders. "If there's any law can punish you, you shall suffer for this," he said. "Now take yourself off quickly before they murder you."

The victim, and he was a young lad, was carried with rough gentleness to the settlement, and I believe lay in Vancouver hospital for long months afterwards, while when his companions returned at night an informal meeting was held in the shanty to discuss the matter. One man kept watch by the doorway with an axe in his hand, and it would have gone ill with any of Marshall's friends who tried eavesdropping. Mellard, who had gone with the others, also said to Tom, "They have a storekeeper down there who acts as magistrate, but he seems grossly ignorant, and either cannot or will not do anything—says it's no use making a fuss over an accident, and I'm afraid we would hardly prove deliberate negligence in Vancouver. Still, the townsfolk don't like Marshall, and I should say before long there'll be rough justice done."

There was no uproar at that meeting and but little profanity, for the men were too deadly earnest to vapour, and instead discussed matters with a cold, vindictive common sense which surprised the writer. One of them pointed out this was not an accident, Marshall knew the danger, and refused to remedy it, while he also repeated a story I afterwards found to be true. A similar mishap took place a little while before just across the U.S. border in the State of Washington, where a contractor, in spite of warnings, caused the death of a man. His comrades hung the offender then and there on the spot, and promptly dispersed among the mountains. They were not all Americans, but numbered Italians and Chinese too, yet though the Sheriff's posse, who knew every trail and ford, promptly turned out in chase, not one among them was apprehended. Nevertheless, he did not recommend that kind of thing, the speaker said, though they surely meant to teach Marshall a lesson, but it must be after the settling day when every man would receive his earnings, while the offender's cup of iniquity was

proved full to the brim when the speaker produced a time sheet in which those who went down to the settlement were debited half a day. All this was, of course, mean and sordid, but the narrator is not responsible for that. So for a week the chopping progressed steadily, and Marshall, who had been quiet for the first few days, recovered his temper, and bullied the men more savagely than before, not knowing that even then the sword was hanging above his head.

In the end it was Tom who fired the train when late on the last afternoon we rolled together the smaller logs for the purpose of burning them. These were sawn in lengths of some fourteen feet, and toiling with handspike and cantpole, or with our shoulders against the bark, we rolled them up stout skids over one another into a pyramid. It was a somewhat dangerous task because the logs were heavy, while if one should overpower us as we lifted the chances were that falling it would break some one's arm or leg, and we worked conscientiously for our own preservation. Still Marshall was not satisfied, and sat perched

upon a neighbouring pile coarsely abusing us until it happened that Tom ripped his arm. Then with many adjectives he pointed out that it served him right, and Tom, wheeling suddenly, flung his spiked cantpole at the speaker's head. Luckily it did not strike him, or a hard man's career would have been ended, but whirring noisily past his ear caused him to lose his balance, and lurch over backwards into ten feet of tangled brush. He crawled forth choking with fury some minutes afterward, and strode towards the assailant revolver in hand, which was the first time I saw a pistol drawn in anger in the whole of Canada. Then matters began to look ugly, for the gang closed in with handspikes and axes, but whatever the man's faults were he was not a coward, and hailing his brother and foreman he stood fast threatening them. Mellard ended the matter by going forward with empty hands, and saying quietly—

"Put it away, Marshall, and don't make a fool of yourself. You can't shoot all of them, and if you miss any I don't think they'll miss you. Besides, we're all of us tired of your

nasty ways, so after to-morrow you can do the work yourself."

One by one the others flung down their weapons, and went back to the shed, where early on the morrow, in ominous silence, each received his pay and even forgot to dispute unwarranted deductions. Afterwards I went down to the settlement, and, leaving my chattels at the little hotel, spent many hours casting for sea-trout in the river, glad to forget the past few weeks in the musical murmur of hurrying water. So it was evening when I came back again, and found Harry Easton seated with a troubled face on the verandah.

"Mellard's broken loose at last — rye whiskey," he explained. "The rest have got themselves badly drunk, and have gone off whooping through the bush with some of the citizens—they left a message you were to hurry along. Tom, worse luck, has gone as well, to keep Mellard from harm he said, and they'll probably clean out Marshall's camp to-night. I suppose you're not sufficiently mad to follow them."

I only shrugged my shoulders and deter-

mined to stay where I was, so what followed was gathered from hearsay. It was twilight when the invaders fell upon the enemies' camp, also, as it happened, Marshall was absent, and the first thing they did was to bring out what their leader called his "dom't tin crockery." This they conscientiously flattened, every basin and every plate, with an axe-head upon a hemlock stump, flogged the pair of horses until they bolted, and made a roaring bonfire of Marshall's raiment. Next, some inventive genius suggested they should shackle the oxen with a log chain round his house, and amuse themselves by pulling it up by the roots. This was received with acclamation, and, rent asunder by four sturdy oxen, Marshall's snug dwelling was scattered all over the clearing. Afterwards they proceeded to stuff his cast-iron stove with the purple blasting-powder used at that time largely for the dest- -ction of trees, and firing a long train thereto departed hurriedly for the bush, where the last just escaped annihilation by flying fragments.

Sitting on the hotel verandah I heard the

explosion, which rolled repeated along the hill-slopes through the stillness of the evening, and saw a distant cloud of yellow smoke curl up against the sky-line from among the pines. Then Harry said, "They're getting in their work, and there won't be much left of Marshall's when they have finished. Confound them! I hope Tom will not run into trouble."

The pearly northern twilight had faded into dusk, the stars were twinkling forth one by one above the dark conifers, while the boom of the river rang louder through the deepening night, when a clamour of voices broke out in the little town. Next, hatless, half-naked, and panting, Marshall fled down the street, while a disorderly rabble following hard behind hurled execrations and shingle after him. Among the rest I saw Tom struggling to hold back Mellard, and exchanging glances we leapt down the verandah stairway.

"Help me to hold the lunatic," gasped our comrade when we reached his side. "He has taken leave of his senses, and things have gone far enough." Then there followed an exciting five minutes, and it took the whole three to

subdue Mellard, while during the operation my one remaining jacket was rent almost in halves. But it was done somehow, and locking him for safety in a store behind the bar, we went back exhausted to the verandah again, where Tom said breathlessly, "I'm glad we got him, for I don't want to be mixed up in what will happen if they lay hands on Marshall. They met him riding in by the saw-mill trail and tore the clothes off him, but he broke through fighting so pluckily that, much as I hate the man, I stood aside to give him law. If they catch him afterwards it's not my business, and I almost hope they will."

It was perhaps ten minutes later that a howl of disappointed wrath announced the escape of the fugitive, and we heard subsequently he evaded his pursuers by swimming the river; when feeling contented the matter had ended so, the writer sought his couch in a matchboard cubicle. Next morning, after continuing the festivities all night, the timber-cutting gang felt sick and repentant, and were then waited on by a deputation of the more prosperous inhabitants. It might be Marshall had only

received his deserts, these said, but such proceedings did not reflect credit on that town, and it might be well if the rioters honoured some other place with their presence.

The latter took the hint in good part, and set out with borrowed ponies over the trail to the C.P.R., though they halted under the verandah and howled thrice in farewell to "t' gradely captin," while a burst of laughter rose up from the spectators when one disreputable object announced that they had forgiven Marshall. Mellard lifted his hat to them, and then said quietly to us, "Of course I made a fool of myself again, and I thank you for taking care of me. It's an old story, and you've probably seen it played out to the bitter end before. Pah! they know no better, and I who do, to figure as a drunken leader of drunken rabble. Well, there's a heavy price to pay for all wilful foolishness."

Neither Tom or I made answer, for we felt there are occasions when silence is best, and Mellard was strangely subdued until, two days later, we set out in a pack-canoe down river.

CHAPTER XI

ON THE NORTH-WEST COAST

IT was in Vancouver City—whose inhabitants being divided on the question of granting a subsidy to bring a new railroad in, held many public meetings and worked themselves into a state of fierce excitement—that we lost our comrade again. Mellard, though one of the most amiable and courteous of men, possessed a curious instinct which always led him into the forefront of a disturbance, and I believe by some means gained an influence with one of the parties. Now in many Western cities a man of parts, if it be only a gift for public speaking, a fine voice, or skill with an instrument, is often found employment for the purpose of keeping him there, but as we could do neither we went on alone.

I cannot determine whether it was before or after this we hunted seals. The sequence

of events seems to point to the latter, but the habits of the fur-seal would prove the contrary. In any case, leaving Harry painting railings, I think, because he was always ill at sea, Tom and I took passage with a new friend from Victoria in a schooner bound for the Skeena to an inlet on the north-west of Vancouver. She was both old and rotten, and her crew mostly Chinamen whose methods of handling canvas were eccentric, but with a warm wind gently rippling the blue roll of the Pacific she wallowed along at a five-knot pace, shouldering off broad folds of cerulean brine, past as glorious a panorama as any on this earth.

It was a sunny morning when we left Victoria, where beyond the high-piled masonry of business edifices a circle of wooden villas stretches down the land-locked bay. No building of brick or stone could be made half so pretty as these bijou dwellings with their painted scroll-work and carved verandahs, nestling half-hidden among fruit trees and flowering creepers. But the cities have been written of many times before, and this narrative deals

with life in the open. Beating out with weathered and ill-set canvas through the Straits of San Juan, before sunset we had sunk the purple lower slopes of the great Olympian range in a sapphire sea, though far up above us there still remained a majestic white saw-edge floating isolated in crystalline ether. Also on passing the basin of Squymault, where the British warships lie, the skipper related an incident which I understood had lately troubled the Provincial Government, besides causing fierce indignation in Victoria, and I give it to the best of my memory in his own language.

"A Dutch barque came in to load salmon," he said, "though why she didn't go to Victoria I can't exactly say. Now your men-of-war captains are almighty big men, and the commander of the flagship he orders her out. The Dutchman said he had no right, and he'd see him roasted first, so the commander cuts the moorin's and gettin' steam on the pinnace makes them tow her ten mile out to sea, where they left them settin' topsails an' runnin' the staysails up. Then the lieutenant comes home with the pinnace feelin' satisfied he had fixed

that Dutchman up, but next morning the commander goes everlastin' mad, for there was the blamed old salmon barque comin' in again.

"'You go away to Victoria, or Vancouver: this is our place,' he says; and that Dutchman answers, 'You go to perdition, I'm coming right in here.'"

"This time the pinnace was busy doin' somethin' else, so the bluejackets was sent in the cutters to tow him out again, an' they did it cussin' tremendous under a blazin' sun, while the square-heads sits on the foc's'le makin' faces at them. It's no use talking of discipline because the mate was there, and he heard them himself. I forget just how many times they towed them Dutchmen out, but next morning they were sure to be back again; then some of the municipalitites they took the matter up, and there was a high-class row over that salmon. Some of them ironclad skippers is too big for their boots, and they're chiefly handy knocking ships' bottoms out, while if you ever meet the ——'s men ask them what they did with her when they went into Nainoose Bay."

The skipper's narrative was more or less correct, though whether the obstinate Hollander eventually got his salmon I do not remember. All the next day the white peak of Mount Baker followed us, clearly seen across some two hundred miles of lesser ranges, and great pine forests which rolled down to the sea; then the wind breaking northward drove us out close-hauled into the lonely wastes of the Pacific. It would serve little purpose to describe how tack and tack we thrashed the old schooner across the mile-long flaming swell, because that journey much resembled the one which followed, but at last her skipper landed us in a lonely rock-walled opening away north of Nootka Sound. No name is attached to it on the largest scale chart, indeed such inlets may be found in thousands all the way from San Juan to Alaska, and its Indian appellation was almost unpronounceable, being apparently a succession of "u's" and "chucks," although not to be confounded with Uchucklet. In spite of the writer's good intentions the narrative becomes discursive occasionally, but to give even a rude

idea of this chaos of mountain and forest and the men who dwell there it is of necessity so.

Anthony Leyland, our companion, was a little mad we had been told, but when we knew him better I decided I had rarely met a saner man. Being a Briton of property some years before he had bought several thousand acres of virgin forest lying between the great Central Lake and the west coast of Vancouver Island. To this he removed his family and built at much expense a frame house in a lovely valley, while the nearest settlers wondered what had brought him there. He could find no possible market for anything he grew, and, if he liked that kind of thing, it was a waste of money to purchase land, they said, because he could live there undisturbed for ever. Leyland, however, once explained the matter to me.

"I had no taste for business," he said, "and disliked crowds as much as politics, while I had always a longing for a healthy natural life, where with time to think one could use his strength and energy in intelligent and useful labour. My boys were wildly fond of sport

in the open air, and, strange to say, the rest of my family agreed with me, so in spite of kind friends' warning we came out and bought this place, and I do not think they have ever regretted it. Besides, even so far as money goes, this will be a rich land some day, and before I have passed the holding on it will be worth three times what I gave for it."

Fortunately there are others like him in British Columbia, and when afterwards I visited his beautiful house and gardens, and saw the contented family growing up about him, it struck me it was a pity more of the same kind had not followed him. We had met him in Victoria, and he offered to find us in provisions with a share of the profits, should there be any, in return for our company on a seal-hunting cruise.

It was towards the close of a scorching afternoon when we lay on the smooth-worn shingle of the inlet, watching an Indian workman put the finishing touches to a big sea canoe. At our feet a lane of deep, green water lapped lazily along the white pebbles, and across it for perhaps eight hundred feet a bare slope of

smooth rock ran up glinting in the light of the westing sun, until the dark pines climbed towards the blue again. Another ridge rose behind us for a thousand feet or so, but this was draped by cedars, while between the last trunks and the water stood two long, barn-like buildings, Siwash rancheries. Now the Siwash, or coastwise Indian of the Pacific Slope, has little in common with the redskin of the prairie. The latter is, with a few marked exceptions, generally speaking, a sullen scarecrow who lives in his reserve on Government bounty, or peddles polished buffalo horns about the stations, stealing also on opportunity the wheat-growers' fowls. I have seen the same group sitting beside the track many days on end, immovable and wooden, each one chiefly clad in a dirty blanket which he held together about his throat. The Blackfoot always does so, for it has apparently never struck him that it would save labour to sew on a strap or string. Once, too, I lived in a teppee with a few who were fishing, and though they could speak some English rarely elicited more than a grunt from

any of them. Perhaps it is a feeling that he is the last of a worn-out race which oppresses the Prairie Indian, but this is doubtful.

The coastwise Siwash, however, is widely different, and apparently rather of Oriental than American origin, though how he got into that continent scientists have so far not satisfactorily explained, because the Straits of Behring would be a bad place to cross in a canoe. He is generally squat and broad-shouldered instead of tall, with face and colour of somewhat Mongolian type, ingenious and good-humoured almost invariably, and proficient in several industries. Salmon-catching for the canneries, seal-hunting, and the transport of merchandise by pack-ponies and canoes are his favourite occupations, but he can turn his hand to many things, and is often better off than the average white settler, owning many ponies, or fleets of canoes. For the rest, he usually dresses in canvas garments of American fashion, and being, like most useful native races, a sturdy pagan, worships a mythology of spirits with unpronounceable names.

Pechacalum, our pilot, stood before us sur-

veying the sea canoe with an air of pride, and grinned approval, holding up a tiny adze hardly larger than his thumb, when Tom, patting his shoulder, said, "I don't know how you made her with that wretched thing, but I would back her to distance many a steamer's gig."

He was probably right, for the craft in question was beautifully modelled. Chopped out of a straight-grained cedar with an axe, hollowed inside by fire and further hewing, her dimensions were some twenty feet by five, while it must have taken weeks of patient labour to smooth her to a finished state with the diminutive adze. The forefoot was rounded, and the stem swept up carved into the likeness of the head of a bird. The entrance was knife-like underneath, while the bows flared out above it to lift her in a sea. The sweep of beaded sheer pleased the eye, while the swell of bilge, long, flat floor, and easy lines of the run promised that she would travel fast under the paddle. And yet the Siwash carpenter used neither rule nor mould, and built her with three tools—the axe, the pine-knot brand, and a microscopic adze.

Presently some one hailed us in Chinook, and we entered the rancherie, where they regaled us with venison, grouse, and berries sun-dried in paper racks, with white fern roots and flapjacks, and some very good green tea. A Siwash dwelling seems run on Socialistic principles, for so far as we could discover the several families inhabiting it had everything in common. Neither are there any partitions, only a line scored along the floor allotting so much space to each group of persons. The big one-storied house was also well built from the carved totem tree before it to its shingled roof, and just then seemed filled with rifles, blankets, and other portable wealth. This, Pechacalum explained, was due to the fact that a big "potlach" had been held somewhere near recently, and as the latter is an original method of purchasing a life annuity it merits a brief description.

When a Siwash Tyhee, or other person of importance, feels that old age is coming on he often sends word to all his kinsmen and scattered followers. These come in over mountains and through tangled forest, or in

light canoes along leagues of surf-beaten coast, and foregathering at his dwelling fast for so many hours. Then a sumptuous banquet is provided and they eat, so Pechacalum averred, until they cannot see out of their eyes, after which every guest receives a costly present—a rifle, several ponies, or a big sea-canoe—according to his station and the means of the giver. Thus when the feast is finished the host remains a pauper, for all his worldly possessions have been given away. But henceforward those assembled are bound to provide for him, and help his descendants in time of adversity, and it is said they seldom fail to perform their part of the undertaking.

So, discussing this and other matters in broken English and indifferent Chinook, which is a curious jargon with traces of Russian and French, we wiled the evening away until it was time to roll ourselves in our blankets. Sleep would not come, however, though I earnestly courted it, and for some hours I fought a losing battle with voracious insects. Mosquitoes are bad in British Columbia, indeed there are river valleys into which after

nightfall neither man nor beast dare venture, but there were even worse things in that rancherie. So when flesh and blood could stand it no longer, treading softly lest I might offend our kindly hosts, I went out into the cool night breeze that swept up the inlet. But even here was no respite, until in torment I took to the water, while never did the touch of clean, cool brine feel so delicious. When I came up dripping on to the pebbles again I found Leyland had also done the same, and we contemplated our garments long and dubiously before we put them on. Then I looked at Leyland, and he shook his head and said: "A little of that rancherie is quite enough for me, and I don't think I have the hardihood to go back there again."

So we curled up in our blankets under the lee of a boulder, and shivering I listened to the moan of the soft swell about the pebbles, and the cedars sighing, until sleep silenced them, and when next my eyes were opened fan-shaped streamers of yellow light shooting up from behind the eastern wall of mountains told that the day had come.

CHAPTER XII

AMONG THE SEALS

A COOL air came down from the ranges, though the morning sun shone hot, when with the help of half the inhabitants of the rancherie we launched the sea canoe over the shingle, and a lip of flashing brine licked about her as she took the water. Then we slung our rifles, wrapped in covers of seal-intestines, under the thwarts, stowed a bag of flour and other provisions with an axe and rolls of blankets on the branches in the stern, and at Pechacalum's bidding dipped the long paddles. The group of dark-skinned Siwash waved us farewell, and many good wishes followed us in the quaint Chinook. Then the paddles splashed faster, and clear green water frothed white at the bows, while crag, and pine, and shingle beach slid by astern. Meantime a dull, vibratory monotone grew louder, and the canoe

lurched more sharply to the lift of the swell. Presently, passing a giant headland which fell sheer to the water, we saw the mile-long heave of the Pacific piling itself with a momentum gathered perhaps all the way from Japan in spouting cataracts upon a pine-clad islet, while beyond its terminal ridge of battered rock stretched a pale blue shimmering. Here was an opportunity of testing the new canoe, and though her builder growled something about "Contox, hiyu chuck," which we translated that the surf was bad, he seemed to have full confidence she was equal to the task.

Leyland was skilled at the paddle like others of his kind, Tom had been used to landing goods through the surf of the tropics, and I had served an arduous apprenticeship as an open boat racer, so trusting to our pilot we prepared short-handed to attempt the passage, and with Pechacalum dipping the steering blade over the quarter, the canoe slid cautiously past the end of the island. Then we saw two fangs of rock rising through the sea smoke out of a white smother, until a frothing roller obliterated them, when the Siwash howled orders to paddle.

We bent our backs and lifted her with every thudding stroke, but were too late to shoot through in time, for a transparent wall of water ranged up ahead, the sunlight flashing on its incandescent crest, and broke in one white chaos between the end of the island and the boulder-sprinkled beach. So we checked the canoe a few moments, then drove her out with might and main, buried to the gunwale in the streaky rush, between the spires of rock. We had left them perhaps forty yards astern when the light craft sank down in a deep hollow, and another breaker came rolling in ahead.

We checked the pace to ease the blow, and then waited breathless—or at least such was the white men's case—until a ridge of tossing white curling over diagonally hung apparently overhead. Then the canoe stood up, it seemed almost on end, and I knew the flaring bows were doing their work, for the rush of water lifted her instead of bursting on board. Next, poised horizontally, with half her length in the air, she was swept stern first towards the islets by the run of the sea, and we whirled the paddles desperately, knowing what would

happen if she struck. But lurching giddily she sank down into the hollow, and glancing over my shoulder I saw the breaker rolling shoreward majestically until it dissolved into smoke upon the rock, while almost at that instant a heavy shock and a deluge down my neck told that the light craft had plunged into the second roller. She reeled forth half-full, but having drawn out from the shore the next was smoother, and five minutes later, exhausted and dripping, we paddled clear of the surf on to the high smooth heave of the open sea.

Then we bailed her and squeezed out our garments, taking comfort from knowing that a well-packed flour bag may be immersed altogether without suffering great damage. The water will penetrate perhaps a quarter of an inch, and then it forms a cake which protects the rest. Next we set two big sprit-sails, and white froth lapped the gunwale as, swaying down to the west wind, she stretched away to the north, swinging like a pendulum across the backs of the sea. For a week that voyage continued, and the wind held steadily fair. All day we lounged on the spruce

boughs, lulled almost to sleep by the drowsy gurgle, while away to the westward there ran a limitless succession of heaving levels, flashing back the sunlight from their wrinkled shoulders, and streaked with deep purple and indigo in the hollows. On the other hand, a panorama that was almost monotonous from too much beauty unrolled itself, beetling crags with white surf hissing at their feet, forest-filled valleys, and rugged mountains, while seen right across the island and the straits beyond, the great Coast Range of the mainland lifted its glistening summits high up against the east. Then the northern end of the island sank lower in the sea, until we left it behind us and reached in towards the main. At night Pechacalum generally found us some inlet reft through the mountains or crystal river mouth, where in dead smooth water we ran the canoe ashore, and camped among the boulders at the foot of the conifers.

The whole coast of British Columbia is fretted with such fiords, whose wild grandeur no pen can describe, which lie from year's end to year's end under the silence of unbroken soli-

tude. Wonderful natural harbours with timber enough behind them to last for centuries, iron, gold, and copper, in the sheltering ranges, a climate almost unequalled for health-giving properties, and an abundance of fish in the sea, such are the chief features of the coastwise region, yet much of it remains a wilderness waiting development. And some day when older England is turned into one huge mart and workshop, when cities and mines and railroads have blotted the last meadow out, and there is dearth of air and space for the swarming multitudes, future generations will bless the foresight of statesmen, and the restless energy of free-prospector and axe-man pioneer which has provided for them a still richer heritage. Many men have died for this, wandering in the old days through the snows to Caribou when there was neither road nor mule-track through the spray-filled cañons. Even now the bones of others lie but half-rotted in the glacier-barred desolation between the Albertan foothills and the Oominica, and there is scarcely a thundering pool in the Fraser gorges, sunk down it may be two thousand feet between awful walls of rock,

which has not in time past also claimed its toll of of adventurous Englishmen. It is the same old story whose truth is somewhere hidden in the heart of that race, for without the shedding of blood there is no dominion, and it is well for the nation that the Viking spirit has probably never burned fiercer than it does to-day. Also, more than any Government, the broken, the hopeless, and the outcast, are doing a great work for us, while if any of their number had the power to tell it well, having seen them thrashing the rotten schooners through uncharted reef-sprinkled seas, starving as in the dogs' traces they haul the heavy sledges through the ice-bound wilderness, or dying like flies of pestilence to open a road for the palm-oil trade in the sweltering tropic swamps, he could write a story that would fill Englishmen's hearts with flame. I have seen a very little, heard somewhat more, while cholera, malaria, blizzard, yellow jack, and whirring snow-slide have each accounted for some comrade's life, but with feeble skill one dare but hint at a task which requires a master's hand.

So far we had fared almost luxuriously, sleep-

ing on couches of cedar boughs, or floating under warm sunlight across an untroubled sea, and the one thing which disturbed us was that we had found no seals. This was, however, shortly remedied, for one day, when not far from a mainland river, far down under the shimmering surface I saw a dim grey shadow shoot swiftly behind what seemed a flash of light. This, Pechacalum said, was a fur-seal chasing a halibut or something of the kind, and as he must rise presently Tom held the steering paddle while the rest took up the rifles. Soon a mouse-grey back came rippling out of the swell, and a whiskered head, which reminded me much of a pug-dog's, was turned inquiringly towards us. I rested the Marlin barrel upon the gunwale, wriggling my cheek along the stock in a vain endeavour to keep the sights in line, for target and canoe swayed different ways puzzlingly with each lift of the sea. Then the flash of the Siwashe's Winchester dazzled my eyes, there was a ringing crash behind my ear, and, firing I fear blindly, I pressed the trigger, and felt the butt jar sharply against my shoulder.

Something splashed heavily in the sea ahead, though I could not see it for the drifting smoke, and grew still a second later when Leyland's rifle spoke. I heard Tom dipping the paddle, the blue vapour drifted clear, and soon the bows rubbed against a floating object which, from appearance, might have been a drowned calf. We had to pass the sprit-sail sheets under it by way of a parbuckle, and the writer at least was tired when we rolled it in. It was a shapeless creature covered with long, coarse hair daubed freely by sticky grease, and much resembled a skin bag filled with jelly. Such is the bachelor fur-seal, called further north teh "holluschuck," and anything more unlike its finished product, a lady's jacket, it would be hard to imagine. The skins can only be properly dressed in London, where the outer hair is pulled out, I heard, with pincers, and the inner one cut several times and also often dyed.

We had started the skinning, for under certain conditions the carcase heats, when the fur comes out in lumps, and I can still remember the sickening smell of the blubber layer, when

Pechacalum bade us paddle again, and three rifles were emptied at another seal. Floating seemingly asleep on the surface this one was clearly struck, though two projectiles, one of which Tom declared was from my rifle, flung up sparkling flashes at each ricochet, but it sank and never appeared again, for unless the seal be wounded mortally it goes down and apparently drowns itself in the lower depths of the sea. Still, we got two that morning, and here the writer ventures to branch off into natural history, condensing the fuller knowledge of others, and what he heard on board sealing schooners when he once sailed to the north.

Where the fur-seals of the Pacific go to in the winter no one seems exactly to know, though some may be found occasionally all the way from Cape Horn to the islands of Japan. Still, regularly every springtime they swarm towards the misty waters of the Behring Sea, while thresher and shark and Siwash take toll of them on the way. There, so the Americans say, they breed on only two little islands, St. Paul and St. George of the lonely Pribiloffs,

and the Rocks of Komandorski in Russian waters. So on moonlit nights in May thousand by thousand the veteran bulls haul out on strip of shingle and rocky ledge, and for perhaps three weeks fight savagely for a few square feet in the "rookery," when a certain number perish in the contest. Then the little cow-seals come out of the sea in turn, and are appropriated by the victors, who for more than a month touch no morsel of food, but keeping grim watch roar incessant menace over their calving mates. The din they make can be heard through the boom of the groundswell several miles to sea. Meantime, the hollus-chuckie, or bachelor seals too young to enter the fight, also haul out and herd apart, and it is these which are slain by the lessees, while when the summer is over all depart again.

Now no unauthorised person may kill the seals ashore, or within ten miles, I think, of the beaches, so the free-lance schooner captains shoot them while floating asleep or rising to breathe in open water—or they ought to do so. But these modern Ishmaelites, it is whispered, know other beaches than those generally talked

about, where they fill their holds illegally in a bad season. Besides, in a region of almost eternal mist and rain, when the seals swarm past in thousands, it is easy to compute wrongly the distance from land. Thus three nations' gunboats have for some years been kept busy in the North, and curious stories are related of high-handed actions by either side, while the troubles occasionally almost resolved themselves into open warfare, and once American vessels were armed with quick-firing guns. I was also told of a Russian cruiser's cutters attempting unjustified seizure being beaten off in actual fight, and from collateral evidence believed the story, while shortly before I visited a certain sealer's haunt a good many strange things happened which those interested did not consider it good for the public to know.

In all we killed eight or nine seals, which, though several were of the common and less valuable kind, would seem to indicate that the whole of the holluschuckie do not enter the Behring Sea, or reach there very late, for even travelling at topmost speed those in question must have arrived long behind the rest. But

fine weather does not last for ever on the British Columbian coast, and a hard breeze set in from the westward, driving before it a blinding deluge. We were caught some twenty miles from land when it came down on us suddenly streaking the sea with white, and it needed sharp work to get the sprit-mainsail in. Then with only the foresail set we staggered down-wind for the coast, the writer devoutly thankful that Pechacalum, adopting the white man's ways, had fitted a rudder as well as a steering paddle. The long swell was soon piled up in slate-green, froth-tipped walls, which came thundering up astern of us, and splitting under the after end swept us along half-buried in foam. But the long straight floor of the canoe made steering easy, and in spite of the pressing canvas, which we dare not reduce, she stormed on with no dangerous twisting before the following seas.

Released at last from my turn at the tiller, I sat in the water and bailed, finding it by no means easy to keep the flying craft free, with my eyes fixed anxiously towards where land should be. It was nearly dusk when a spray-veiled headland loomed up through

the driving scud, and not daring to attempt a landing there, we ran the risk of rolling over by hauling the wind awhile. Wallowing giddily, with the sea on the quarter, she lurched diagonally shorewards, until, when half-full, Pechacalum ran her in under an island, one of the thousands sprinkled everywhere along this fissured coast. Here behind a surf-lapped shingle spit we found a sheltered beach, and crawled out dripping and stiffened, but thankful when the keel took the pebbles. There was a wall of small spruce behind us, with one or two cedars, a spout of crystal water came splashing down a rock, and by the time darkness set in we had made a roaring fire of resinous wood, and lay with half-dried garments under a branch-built shelter. How for a week we waited while the deluge continued, and then made fifty miles southing under pitiless drizzle with the paddle before we picked up an old propeller groping down the coast, would make a long and somewhat monotonous story. In due time the steamer loosed the canoe's tow-line off Barclay Sound, and the writer will never forget the weary, raw-handed struggle

paddling her forty miles dead to windward, because she had no keel that would help her to beat, under mist-wrapped mountains up the Alberni Canal, where the rush of a blinding deluge beat down the white-topped sea. It was done, however, after three days' arduous fight, and as many nights spent shivering in pools of water. Then with little flesh left on either palms or knees, he came ashore thankfully at the little wharf again, while it required a week of delicious idleness to recover from that trip.

CHAPTER XIII

IN CARIBOU

IT was in the Caribou country that, long after we had last seen him, we met our unfortunate friend the municipal clerk again. Chiefly from lack of funds we had walked up much of the way from Ashcroft, a journey of more than a hundred and fifty miles, and every league of the country we traversed was haunted by historic memories, for if there is one part of the mountain province more interesting than another it is Caribou. Here and there may be seen rotting bridges the old-time prospectors made, and the trails they hewed and died upon still wander, choked with willows or grown up by smaller trees, into the silent bush. Hill-side, gravel-bar, and bench bear the scars of abandoned workings, and over it all hangs the glamour of romantic story, wild riot, and some-

times bloodshed in the wooden hamlets where the pack-trains halted coming south with burdens of gold, the delirious joys of triumph when wealth was won at last, and through it all an undertone of starvation, despair, and death. In one dark gorge a party were swept out of life by a flood, in another a roaring snow-slide blotted out a riotous camp, and one still hears how by this gravel-spit or crumbling flume the man who had sunk his last dollar there destroyed himself. And, remembering what these early adventurers did and suffered in traversing what was then an almost impassable wilderness, one would almost fancy they were giants rather than men.

A few found wealth beyond the dreams of avarice, many lost the little they had, and others perished, but there was no obstacle sufficient to turn them aside, and they laid down their lives for the opening up of a great province. This has been pointed out before by many more eloquent, but the truth will bear repetition, and it is fitting sometimes to pay due tribute to the memory not only of the leaders who return triumphant, but also

the legion of rank and file who never come back at all.

In any case, when we had neither to swim rivers, nor crawl like ants on some echoing cañon wall, but only traversed a more or less passable road, we limped, worn-out and painfully, into a little mining camp not far from the Quesnelle. Here, being lucky, we were able to take a contract to wheel a pile of gravel across a gully, and commenced operations the following morning. Caribou, although it has long lost its former glory, when five millions sterling worth of gold was won from one creek alone, is waking up again, for now giant monitors and river dredging, with modern appliances for washing down the hillsides and diverting the course of streams, obtain fair results even from abandoned workings, while the sanguine say there is still as much treasure in Caribou as was ever taken out. There was, however, nothing romantic about our share in gold mining. By wheeling a heavy barrow along bending spruce boards or labouring with a shovel among muddy gravel we hoped, if we were diligent, to earn about two dollars a day,

while provisions would cost us more than half of it, so I agreed with Tom who said, "I don't think we need be afraid of getting rich too suddenly."

In the heat of the second afternoon, for even in late autumn the valleys are hot, I sat down dripping under a spruce, while Tom dabbled his bleeding fingers on which old wounds had reopened in a little cool water. Close by, and standing waist-deep in a rush of muddy fluid which was probably melted snow, a man resembling a skeleton hung with frayed blue canvas was wearily clearing small boulders from under pile-shoes, stopping every now and then to pant distressfully. The burning sun-rays beat fiercely down on his head, while we knew what would follow with his lower limbs chilled to the bone, and Tom said, "That's a somewhat deadly business for any one in his state of health, but there's something very familiar about him. Wait until he turns his face again—yes, by George, it's the poor woman's husband. You remember the pair we met in the colonist train?"

Risking our employer's indignation, Tom

recklessly upset his load into the gully, while I left my barrow to take care of itself, and soon, with pleasure on the one side and pity on the other, we grasped the pile-driver's hands. He seemed worn to a shadow, scarcely fit indeed to stand, and yet was struggling pluckily at work which has killed many stronger men; but a good-humoured remonstrance, "Stir up and get a rustle on, there are plenty flies about," cut explanations short, and we had only time to ask him to come to our tent at night.

We had washed and eaten that evening, and lay stretched with aching bones outside the little tent which for various reasons both preferred to the shanty, when our former friend came up. He was dressed in ragged garments still damp with mud and water, and collapsed rather than sat down on our layer of branches. For a time I did most of the talking, while Tom sat still and smoked, and from the puzzled look in his honest face I knew he was turning something over in his mind. Meantime, the gorgeous sunset flung rainbow hues across the mountains, and looking up at

intervals I could see the ranges flaming with unearthly splendours, orange, green, and saffron, crimson and purple, chequered by dusky grey patches where a gorge was rent through them, while a cloud of many-tinted vapour rolled slowly downward, and beneath our feet white mist wreathed like smoke among the pines of a darkening hollow.

Also the fret of the river broke intermittently through our visitor's words, as he slowly told his story, stopping now and then to cough. "I put the last of my savings into the Alberta ranch," he said, "but it was a parching season, and with only alkali water to drink, half the stock we had died off. Besides, I was hardly fit for the work, and came back badly shaken from every weary ride, when we slept drenched with dew in the open; you know the tale of how the stockman sleeps back-upwards to keep the other side dry. Still, I held on, for it was the only hope, thankful I had sent poor Flora to Vancouver, for she sickened instead of improving on that waste of hot prairie.

"Then the crisis came, for without finances

we could not continue, and out of the wreck I just saved enough to maintain Flora a little in her new quarters. I went down there to see her and look for employment, but could find nothing, and leaving my last few dollars, less than a handful they were, came up here with a letter to a contractor. I'm afraid the work is killing me, but what else is there I can do? The chief, and he's not a hard man, is good enough to assure me I'm scarcely worth my board, and it takes the whole of my earnings to keep Flora from want."

"That's why you don't wear flannels, and sleep in damp clothes," said Tom, as though wrathfully, and unobserved by the other, he looked hard at me. "As you say, that kind of thing will kill you some day, and we want a third man to help at shovelling. Let me see, his share should run out nearly two and a half a day, and at least it would be healthier than floundering in ice-water. Are you open to try it?"

Being slow of apprehension I was about to demonstrate there must be something quite amiss in his calculation, but a muddy boot-heel

was driven hard and surreptitiously into my ribs, and there was a look of delight in the other's eyes. Then his face clouded, and he said doubtfully, "It is very good of you, but my help couldn't be worth that much. You would only be robbing yourself."

Thereupon Tom, who had always been hitherto a truthful man, lied deliberately, and concluded by saying, "I make you a business offer, you can accept or leave it. Short-handed work won't pay us, and if you don't take hold I'll walk right in to the settlement and look for some one else."

So the invalid gladly departed to bring his few belongings in, and Tom said quietly, "I'm by no means a clever man, but I'm truly thankful I'm not such a fool as you. Well, well; we must do the best we can to work the two dollars out for that poor woman's sake. Somehow I can't forget her, and, Good Lord! what will that fragile creature do when her husband's buried?"

In due time we transferred the gravel dump to its appointed place by the muddy sluices lower down stream, and after settling, the

proceeds it left us were deplorably small, while with much reluctance our third partner went back to the pile-work again. We did other things in Caribou, including the shovelling of gravel out of icy rivers, and carrying rocks on our heads to repair a tunnel, but I doubt if any brought us in more than a net dollar a day, while a recital of them would prove monotonous. I, however, remember, on the strength of a short experience in British steel-works, taking a contract to sharpen drills.

"I can't get them hard enough," the contractor said. "The last man was mending them eternally, and if you're fit to make the edges stand it will pan out three dollars a day." So with arduous labour we prepared charcoal, and under a miner's directions built a mud furnace, after which, obeying the instructions, "I don't care a cuss about temper—make them as hard as you can," I quenched the glowing rock-drills in icy water, duly counted them over, and went on contented to another camp. Returning several days later I met one of the workmen, and mentioning I had come for

payment, he said, "Take my advice, and light out quick instead. The boss is goin' round cussin', an' lookin' for you with a gun. The head of every blame drill just chipped right off like glass."

We followed his counsel without asking payment, and after several misadventures, including one when Tom nearly blew himself up probing what he thought was a blown-out shot, and the writer being knocked down half-flattened by the spout of a hydraulic monitor, found that shortly much of the work would be stopped for the winter. Then we heard of a private survey expedition being short of men, and determined to go south and join them. So we rolled up our well-worn blankets, and bade our friend farewell.

"If you ever get back to Vancouver you'll call on Flora," he said, "and you needn't tell her just how I am. The poor soul seems to fancy I'm better and getting on, and it might break her heart to learn the simple truth."

I think he also said, "God bless you for

what you have done for me," in return to some cheery words from Tom, then I waved my hat, and presently turning round for a last look we saw him sitting despondently by the trail. It would need several chapters to tell how marching west from the Fraser we wandered for some time through a desolate region and past wide lakes towards the Cascade Mountains. The two men who organised that picnic outfit, so a settler called it, had probably not quite realised what they had undertaken when they started. One was a British sportsman who had already seen some hard work in wild countries, and the other a Canadian land speculator. They had, I understood, a random purpose of marching to the coast through a country even yet little trodden by white men, prospecting for minerals or shooting on the way, for there were rumours of gold finds in several remote valleys between the Fraser and Chilcoh Lake.

The result was the same, however, although they had the assistance of a skilled prospector, because they found no minerals, and besides shooting one or two wood-deer had little sport

either. Then for a week together we scrambled through choked-up valleys and over barren slopes of snow ground rock among a great semicircular sweep of the Cascade Mountains, an awful, chaotic wilderness of precipice and gorge and thundering cataracts, when the leaders had to face the question of provisions running short. Now on a march of that kind everything needed—food, tents, blankets, axes, and rifles, besides many other important sundries—must be carried on the human back, through a country so difficult that eight miles a day is fast travelling, while the march not infrequently sinks to two or three. We were to be paid $2 25c. for our services as choppers and packers, which meant that where it was needed we hewed through willow-thickets and fallen branches, stumbled along all day under a heavy load, and pitched the camp at night, by which time we had certainly well earned our wages. Still, that was comparative luxury to what followed. When we struck the apparently impassable barrier most sportsmen would have gone back, and the prospector guide suggested this should be

done, but, and somehow to our surprise, both sportsman and speculator showed they were made of sterner stuff, for the Briton stood up in the little camp and refused point-blank.

CHAPTER XIV

A TRYING MARCH

IT was raining hard at the time the crisis had to be faced, and we were wet to the skin, because the two tents would not cover all, and several of the party had slept in dripping fern. I had a pain in my shoulder, and my hip-joint ached, which is where a berth on wet ground generally gets hold of one, while the sportsman presented a sorry spectacle. He entered the wilderness beautifully got up in some special fabric warranted to resist any jungle or turn the spent shot from a gun. But leather would hardly withstand a journey like that, and the British Columbian forest had made short work of it. It hung about him in fantastic fragments, the rain had plastered the long hair down either side of his face, and while the prospector explained the position

splashes from the cedar boughs kept drumming on the tents.

"No way we can get over hereabouts?" he said almost airily. "Well, then, find one somewhere else; that is your particular business, and it might be as well to set about it at once. I suppose this kind of mountain doesn't go on for ever;" while the Canadian broke in: "We came out to fetch the coast-line, and we're going to do it."

A consultation followed, to which we listened shivering, and then the leader looked at us, and explained that as food was running short some one must go back, while though he would not hurt our feelings we were the least useful.

"I thank you for your assistance so far," he added, "and I'm sorry it can't be helped. I'll give you a payment order on the Bank of Montreal, and Davies will hand you the last pound of food he can spare."

So Tom and I and Johnson, who was stiff in one knee from a dynamite accident, strapped our blankets together, and were served out scanty provisions, while Davies the prospector gave us instructions as to the journey. It

seemed an easy matter by the way he said it, but it was with misgivings we thanked him and marched out of the dripping camp, the pack-straps viciously sawing an old wound on my shoulder. This, and the eating into the flesh of heavy boots and leggings, is a constant trouble to the bush traveller, and though by no means deadly is often sufficient to keep him in a state of misery. The rest sent shouts of "Good luck!" after us, and I trusted we would get it, for just what distance lay between us and the first white man's canvas dwelling we did not exactly know, while if anything checked us on the way there seemed a fair chance of starving. It might be, perhaps, less than two days' march along a British road, but in the mountain-barred Northland that meant a very different matter.

Following Davies's counsel, we left the gorge and pressed on down a valley filled with primeval forest. There were Douglas firs and white pines, spruce, balsam, and hemlock, while the ground beneath was grown up with underbrush. This, with the ever-present fern, was sufficiently trying, but in that climate

trees rot rapidly, and for some reason one rarely falls alone. So they lay piled over each other in places like a great gridiron, and trusting to the creeper spikes, we generally crawled along the slippery logs, because, being high in the air they were clear of the bracken. It required agility and judgment to drop or clamber from one to another, and falling occasionally one of us would plunge smashing from the mossy side into a veritable bear-trap of branches and briars, with the chance of impaling himself or breaking a limb, which would have resulted in certain death. Several times, I also remember, we tried to crawl through such a pile, and spent perhaps thirty minutes wriggling as many yards, because to go round them would probably have been as bad. In parts where the soil was different there were willows and maples, and despairing of forcing an upright passage we entangled ourselves crawling on all fours among the stems of the former.

So when night came, by incessant exertion we had made some five miles, and sat down to a frugal supper of flapjacks and venison,

which, hungry as we were, I could hardly bite. One might pick the fibres out of it like tarred ropeyarns, but it may be that was just as well.

"Five miles, I estimate, and we have, it's likely, another thirty at least to do. It's going to be a close race to get through while we have anything left to eat," Tom said, as, scraping up every fragment, he put them back in his bag. Sternly curbing my appetite, I followed suit, and then spread my blanket beneath a fir.

Next morning, with Johnson's assistance, we slew two willow grouse, which eccentric creature is very timid among the undergrowth, but when you have flushed him, and this is difficult, flies straight to the nearest branch and decides that he is safe. Now if hit by a rifle bullet the fragments would be hardly worth gathering, so the usual custom is to cut off its head, which is not so simple as it might appear. The willow grouse, however, nowise alarmed, watches the fusilade, only moving a little along its perch, until standing close beneath it the hunter achieves his mark. These, to

save provisions, we ate for breakfast, and they were also tough; then the march went on until Tom yelled exultantly when brightness broke through the green shadow and we saw a lake ahead. But there was neither silver sand nor breadth of white shingle to afford easier travelling, for the forest rolled down to within a yard or two of the water, and the space between was cumbered with whitened drift-logs jammed among boulders. Thereupon Tom lost his patience and abused everything, doing it very well, while Johnson, whose knee hurt him, sat still a few minutes in abject disappointment. The writer chiefly remembers a sense of righteous indignation which would have been appeased by smashing something, only that there was nothing to smash, so he tried the forest, which was denser than ever here, and came out again hopeless, with many cruel thorn-hooks bedded in one leg, after which we floundered on our way once more.

How many miles that lake shore ran, or whether it was more than one, I do not know, for it required grim effort and close attention to progress at all, while we wounded ourselves

all over among its boulders, and only at noon found an outlet by following a stream down a deep ravine. Every one fell in several times, occasionally to the shoulders, while in the faster rushes there was danger of being drowned by one's load. As many a brown-trout fisher knows, the dingles of North Wales and some of the ghylls of Cumberland are bad to traverse, but their passage would be a luxury compared to wading down a forest torrent in British Columbia. Then the spruce-clad banks narrowed to a cañon with no apparent foothold on either stream-course or walls, so for an hour we clawed a way among dwarf firs up a transverse gully, and came out at last, breathless, on a rock shoulder, feeling devoutly thankful for the breadth of slippery stone. That night we lay down shivering in the open under a deluge, and the next three days were passed in incessant murderous toil, when, half-famished and over-wrought, we held on grimly while the rain came sluicing down. So probably none of the party had any clear recollection of what we saw, save that there were always mountains, and sometimes bare plateaux,

and our experience in no way differs from that of many another wanderer in the Coast Range.

It was, I think, the fifth day when we dragged ourselves half-blindly through a big brulée, and I am inclined to fancy we were practically starving, for we had seen but one deer on all the march, and that one Johnson missed. So well do its colours mingle with undergrowth, mossy stone, or fern, that it requires a trained eye to discern a wood-deer, even when standing still at a few yards distance, and the same hold good of most forest creatures. In fact, a new-comer might be led through a tract of bush that swarmed with wolves and bear and deer, and never find a trace of them. Still, all had acquired some woodcraft, and we could only surmise there was no living creature there.

A brulée is also a common feature in British Columbia, and consists of a forest cleaned out by fire originating spontaneously, just how no man knows. So the flame had licked up each thicket, burned off the branches, and left only the huge trunks charred and tottering

upon their bases, or had piled them athwart each other in fantastic ruin. Our feet sank to the ankles in black ash ooze, which spattered us all over to the faces, and there was an intermittent "crunch - crunch" of charcoal under our bleeding feet. This was, of course, in the open spaces where we could walk, because where the trees had fallen we generally crawled instead. To make matters worse, a strong breeze drove the pitiless rain slanting through the burnt-out wood, and under such circumstances a brulée is a somewhat deadly place.

Towards noon, when Tom was reeling with eyes half-shut, Johnson, shambling towards him, grabbed his shoulder with a yell, "Stand still, for your life," and almost without warning a trunk broke off from its base. Sweeping in a wide arc earthwards, the great mass struck another in its fall, there was a crash like thunder, and amid a tumultuous smashing of charred branches three giant conifers smote the ground together, where one of them dissolved into a heap of cinders. In spite of the deluge a cloud of black dust whirled up, while

the solid earth shivered beneath the shock, and almost simultaneously the bush was filled with sound, for here and there about us other trees went down. Perhaps it is the concussion which has this effect, but the fall of one burnt tree is almost invariably followed by that of others. I remember feeling the windage as the mass rushed by, and it may have been this which lifted Tom's hat from his head, but in any case next moment it was buried under tons of charcoal, and its owner kicked the shattered trunk savagely, while the rain beat down on his hair. Then the writer, realising how near the escape had been, felt coldly sick for a moment as well as hungry.

How long we were in the brulée none of us could say, probably a couple of hours, though it seemed days to us, and then we limped forth into more open country, and camped at night-fall beside a torrent. It burst forth from a gorge, swept white-streaked through a mass of boulders, then leapt down a rapid, and Johnson, who knew a little about that region, said, as he collapsed beside it, "There's a prospecting outfit working on the other side somewhere

not far away, and climbing one of those ridges, with luck we might fetch them before we're quite played out. Say, some time before sun-up we ought to get across."

Now a British Columbian stream generally runs highest towards evening, being chiefly fed by melting snow from the heights above. But each night the frost is keen upon the serried ranges, and binding fast sludgy snow and glacier drainage reduces the torrent to half its volume, so that what is a flood at sunset may be a rivulet at dawn. No one had sufficient energy to build a fire; two small pulpy flapjacks, the last morsel, were divided between us, and then crawling under a shelf of rock, I lay down in a rain-soaked blanket to get what rest I could. Sleep seemed out of the question, for every bone ached, while several of the larger joints burned like hot iron. Also, in spite of occasional flushes of feverish heat, I shivered until my teeth rattled together, and all the time a hammering rush of shingle among the boulders or the intermittent and heavy shock of a drifting log, told only too plainly what we might expect at dawn.

At last, however, I suppose my eyelids closed, for I was rudely wakened by a wet hand on my face, and getting somehow upright saw the rocks looming weirdly out of smoky mist in the dim grey light. The rain had ceased, and the stream was now visibly shrunken, but we stared at it almost despairingly, for the hour of dawn is always trying, and then, cold and sick and starving, it appeared better to give up the struggle and lie down again. At least the writer felt so, and on comparing notes afterwards he found the others' case was similar. But Johnson growled some encouragement hoarsely in his throat, and we shook ourselves together for a last effort, as, dropping from a rock ledge, he stood gasping waist-deep in sliding water. Then he had gained a boulder, and clung to it a moment with the stream racing past him almost shoulder-high, while Tom, in dogged silence, followed suit.

I waded in down a shingle slope, and the chill of melting snow pierced like a knife, while the current edged me diagonally towards the head of the rapid, and treacherous pebbles rolled

away beneath my feet. Next it lapped icily about my breast, and, choking, I fought my way for the tail-eddy behind a boulder, and hung on with arms twined lovingly about the foam-ringed stone. The stream seemed still deeper beyond, and though all possessed some skill in natation one cannot swim down a rapid under a heavy pack. Indeed, it is a risky business under the best circumstances, and the bottom grinds one badly when you strike it with the stream. So I stayed there perhaps a minute, seeing nothing but the tossing spray below, and hearing only the boom of the river, until a hoarse shout reached me, and I made out Johnson waving his arms directingly on the further bank. Tom also seemed to be holding his own against the eddy of a revolving pool, and I understood he was waiting to lend me assistance. So with much trepidation I loosed the protecting rock, and, trying to grip the bottom with heels that would slip, went floundering slantwise down-stream, until the rush of water proved too much for my failing strength. Next I lost my footing, went under several times I think, and made some attempt

to swim, which the down-drag of the current and the killing weight neutralised, and then felt a firm grasp upon my shoulder. Tom shouted something I did not catch; Johnson, who had staggered down-stream, was also helping, and at last, half-drowned and choking, I stood upright, with the water only waist-high, upon a jutting shelf. Thus presently three dripping, exhausted objects came out safe upon the further bank.

Space forbids the telling of what we did afterwards, and how we struggled forward until noon, when Johnson, who was foremost, because he now said he knew the way, flung up his shapeless hat and howled, "Fetched them sure at last. What's the matter with that. There's the prospector's camp."

He was right, for a few little tents nestled beside a river, and when we reached them it was a repetition of an old story. A brawny man greeted us with the welcome the unfortunate always meet in that country: "A pretty rough time, strangers, I can see by the look of you. Come right in and settle yourselves to home."

We followed his bidding, and presently ate like wolves, after which we compared notes before we went to sleep, and found our hosts were prospecting towards the upper Bridge River, but hitherto had been signally unsuccessful. They also said we had wandered twice as far as we should, and Johnson's pilotage was proved defective. Still this was not surprising, for there are stories told of Government survey parties making the most surprising landfalls, and it has happened more than once that members of some picnic straying a little in the bush within a few miles of a city have lost their way out from it and perished. There are parts of the tangled forest practically impassable to any but a hatchet-armed athlete. Strange to say, after nearly eighteen hours' sleep I was almost fresh again, and with full directions from our kindly entertainers Johnson managed to bring us out by the Fraser, and so to Lytton and the C.P.R. again.

CHAPTER XV

IN VANCOUVER CITY

ONE prominent feature of life on the Pacific Slope, and indeed in much of the western half of the American continent, is the uncertainty of employment. So many enterprises are hurriedly set on foot and changed with lightning rapidity into something quite different, while promising rising towns sometimes share a similar fate, that a man to succeed there must be adaptable, or, to express it more plainly, willing to attempt the most unlikely things. This perhaps accounts for an almost entire absence of the narrow distinctions of caste, because a saw-mill manager one month may be a grubber of stumps the next, or a mining engineer be glad to earn his two dollars daily by wheeling a barrow. Thus there are few who follow one craft alone, and a floating population drawn from every walk of

life drifts to and fro doing all manner of things, the ex-employer and his labourer not infrequently cleaning streets together. From this it can be understood why marriages are scarce, and the majority of the inhabitants even of the coast-wise cities are single men.

Our experience had been only that of others, so when chance of destiny brought us into Vancouver City, which it may be mentioned is not in the island of that name at all, we settled down contentedly to make the best of it, and were thankful to find employment on the Canadian Pacific wharf. There we unloaded rice, tea, silk and sugar which the big Empress steamers brought in from China and Japan, until having by some means found favour in a manager's eyes we were promoted to assist him as cargo-sorters. So we worked beside the clanging winches, often twelve hours a day when there were steamers in, hauling out and sorting the products of the Orient for distribution over the Western world, and some, such are the developments of modern traffic, to travel across three-fourths of the globe back to the East again. Those who aided us were a

curious gathering—deserving men on whom the hand of fate had pressed heavily, and others sent there by their own vices, though apparently these were very few. Ex-lawyers, captains, younger sons of the wealthy British, too proud perhaps to ask assistance from unkindly relatives, and beside them seamen deserters, and incapable clerks, all worked together, and, strange to say, in peace and harmony.

During the whole of our stay there we hardly heard an uncivil word, and certainly never saw a blow struck in anger, which may have been partly due to the fact that the omnipotent C.P.R. treated its employees like gentlemen. There was never a quibble about overtime—indeed the writer was sometimes paid more than he bargained for. Boys with cans of cool water waited on us in times of hurry, and in contrast to the manner of things at home there was a striking absence of abuse. And I think the great railroad company did not lose by it. Subsequently, in a different capacity, I had to deal with labourers, white and black and coffee-coloured, in various

parts of the world, and never saw work done better or more cheerfully than by the men of the broken legion on the wharf at Vancouver. Also it was clearly shown what a youthful training in athletics and the keener sports will do, for when the winches panted their hardest and there was hurry to clear the big steamer out, those from the higher ranks of life frequently outstayed the rest.

Still, some of our motley assembly had their eccentricities, and I venture to quote one incident. The Dominion Government levies a poll-tax of three dollars on every adult, which is, or was, collected in a somewhat original fashion. Large employers of labour were asked to deduct it from their men's wages, and I believe the former received a commission. Now because most of the wanderers never paid anything to the State they called that levy a scandal and a robbery, and on principle evaded it, so when a rumour went round that the collection would be made a deputation waited on the paymaster, who I think admitted such was the case.

"It's a blanked swindle," said the spokesman,

"on the industrious. Why don't they corral the hoboes who never work at all? I've never paid it so far, and I hope I never shall."

"Lucky man!" said the payclerk, laughing. "How did you manage to get ahead of the Government?" and the other answered, "I just lit out quick when I heard they were prowling round. No, sir, they don't collect any low-grade tax from me. So we'll make the C.P.R. a present of this morning's wages, and strike for another job."

They did so, prematurely as it happened, because we who remained were not mulcted, and the writer to the present day owes the Dominion Government the sum of three dollars.

Each night we went home, tired, certainly, but contented, to a hostelry we had christened English House, and which a certain detachment chartered completely. There we donned white flannels, and some fine linen, and generally extemporised a high-class concert, for there was no lack of good voices, instruments, or talent. Sometimes, too, it struck me that those who worked with us were after all

better off than they would have been at home. It was true they wheeled cargo, or carried it on their backs, but they lacked neither comforts nor pleasures, and their income always exceeded expenses. They were strong and healthy, free from anxiety, while many would have dragged out their lives, careworn and haggard, in the old country, or wasted their manhood in vicious idleness. The whole was an object-lesson to the advocates of social reform, though here there were neither extravagant theories nor purposeless denunciations of established order.

Here, too, we found Harry Easton, who had started in a small way, without any capital, as a house-painter, and installed him in our abode, where Tom and he had afterwards almost a difference over a scaffold the former, proud of his technical knowledge, built, which collapsing nearly killed two Chinamen. At times when waiting for a steamer we organised picnic parties, or lounged beneath the giant pines of the lovely natural park, which overlooks the "Narrows" entrance to Vancouver harbour. One day I well remember, because, though I did not know it then, it was the last holiday

I spent in Vancouver. We lay half-asleep in the sunshine above the wreck of the little *Beaver*, the first steamer to round Cape Horn, which lay right in under the branches of the Stanley pines, and does still unless it has been cut up for walking-sticks and curios. There was an Englishman with us, a relative of mine whom I had found that morning somewhat curiously. The steamer's winches had broken down lifting the last of her cargo, and I walked up the gangway dripping, with sugar crystals plastered over my old blue garments and sweat-soaked hair, when I met a gorgeous officer sauntering down, for the Empress service then prided itself on style. He stared hard at me, and said, "I never recognised you in that draggled scarecrow; what in the world are you doing to get yourself up like that? The last I heard was that you were living in a wigwam and feeding on fern-roots among the Indians. I suppose you did not know I was here?"

The voice made recognition easy where changed appearance had failed, and I laughingly explained that I was merely earning a living by carrying sugar-bags, while far from eating fern-

roots, with the exception of a few days, I had never fared better. Also, when he had fraternised with us and seen our manner of life his comment was, "There are plenty tramp-steamer officers would be glad to change places with you."

So we loafed together on the fragrant pine-needles, the blue inlet shimmering beneath us, and across it a chaos of ranges and forest rolling away to the north, while sloping back from the land-locked basin handsome offices, banks, and churches of splendid masonry rose one above another with a wall of great pines behind. With salt water on two sides of it, girt by forests and snow-capped ranges, and possessing a climate milder than that of Devonshire, there can be few cities healthier to dwell in or more pleasant of prospect than Vancouver. Also it keeps the gateway of what is already a rich land, and will shortly be richer, because a wealth of timber and minerals lies waiting the further advent of engineer and capitalist to drive adits, roads, and bridges to get it out. Thirteen years ago, when euphoniously christened "Slabtown," with but one

house remaining, it was burnt to the ground, yet such is Western energy that the cinders were hardly cold when carloads of stone and iron were on the way, and a second and finer city rose from the other's ashes. That Vancouver is progressive the writer realised, for he bought a little building lot on the edge of the bush, and in spite of a land-agent's machinations sold it later for 30 per cent. profit, which is not, however, the novice's usual experience.

But this is a digression, and presently as we chatted a dilapidated schooner, with two men bending over the gushing pumps, crept in through the "Narrows," her canvas split and weathered into a network of rags, and the paint worn by sun and water from her gaping sides.

"Years and years old!" Tom said, and the liner's mate concurred. "She might have been fished up from the bottom of the sea. Where on earth can they have brought that crazy wreck from? I should say there's some strange story attached to her."

Tom was right, for I believe her story was afterwards discussed at Ottawa, and we presently heard fragments of it. A huge crowd

clamouring that the Government should get up and do something, surrounded a certain saloon by the water-side at night, and looking through the window Tom said, "There are several sealer-men inside apparently belonging to the schooner, and, to judge from appearances, most indecently drunk. Still, they're telling something interesting, and we might try to get in."

We did so, and found a grizzled man with a lined face holding forth amid hiccups to an admiring multitude, and caught portions of his narrative, which went round in a circle apparently without either beginning or end.

"Shut up we was for ever so long in a Russian prison, nothing to eat but bark-bread an' rotten fish, an' them telling us all the time we was to go and dig in a Siberian mine," he said. "What's the good of a blarsted Government that lies down to be kicked. But we euchred the Russians after all."

Here amid much uproar he proceeded to branch off into politics and a tirade against the Muscovite Tsar, while his comrades, contradicting each other, continued the story. Parts

were told in various newspapers, and afterwards denied, but the gist of the matter, as we gathered it, seemed to be this: A sealer's crew had been captured doing something illegal in Russian waters, and were, as occasionally happened, held long in prison while their case was either discussed or forgotten. Then, and I fancy this was never quite settled, the Russian commander growing uneasy either gave them another worn-out schooner confiscated years before, or relaxed his vigilance so that they broke out and stole her. In any case, almost without provisions, and in a vessel scarcely fit to float, they faced a long and dangerous passage across the Pacific, and with many sufferings brought her safely into port.

A fierce dispute then followed between the original owners or their successors and the latest crew, and the question was said to be this: If the Russians had legal grounds for confiscation they had a right to give the vessel to, or allow her to be stolen by, whoever they liked, and she belonged to the men who rescued her. If on the contrary, and this was the more probable, she had been seized wrongfully, then

she must revert to the former owners. In any case, however, she was not worth fighting for, and I believe the affair was compromised. This was one of many sealing episodes some of which led two nations perhaps nearer a quarrel than the uninformed public knew. I would also like to add that with the exception of the crew of a Glasgow sailing ship, this was the only drunkenness I ever saw in Vancouver.

CHAPTER XVI

THE LAST OF THE MOUNTAIN PROVINCE

MEANTIME events in which I had no hand were rapidly rounding up my career in the Dominion. Harry Easton trusted he would earn a sustenance for a time, at least, as a house-painter, which was not quite what he longed for, though it brought the dollars in. Tom, having made many friends, had been engaged to take charge of a small steamer towing logs later on, and we had heard with sorrow earlier that our wheat-growing partner had been lost in the muskegs of Athabasca. Therefore I saw prospect of being left friendless unless I cared to join one of the others in a subordinate capacity. So some little time before I had without reluctance answered a letter from England, hinting about a reasonable berth in the tropics, and waited with some curiosity for the answer.

It was also in Vancouver we heard of Mellard's end, and a man who had known him told us a pitiful story. "They found him a place in the lumber trade," he said, "and just why he gave it up I don't know. Then he tried the wharf, but couldn't work steadily, I fancy there was something wrong with his head, and the boys tried to lend him dollars occasionally. But that man came of a gilt-edged kind, and they couldn't well do it, though a few of his own sort among them sometimes worked a traverse. The last was he went up to the Selkirks as a C.P.R. section hand, and one night some snow and boulders rolled down and blocked the track. A fast freight was coming through, and Mellard knew it, so he must have gone out with tools and a lantern to clear a way or warn them. The loco-engineer didn't see any light, though he ran through a shovelled snow-bank and saw some broken rocks mixed up with it. Next morning the next hand comes along and finds Mellard lying dead beside the track, his hands clenched on a shovel haft, and all his chest crushed in, and no one knows any more about

it. There was hard, clean grit in that man, and my story is they didn't see his lantern or the light went out, and he stuck to it heaving the rocks off until the loco hit him."

So another broken adventurer, whose sins for the most part were chiefly against himself, had gone to his account and I felt that many a better man had made a worse ending.

One night with Tom and Harry, and another detachment of the gentlemen labourers arrayed sumptuously, I went to an entertainment given by a phrenologist who was then reaping a rich harvest in Vancouver. Notwithstanding the shrewd sense of Western citizens, professors of this kind are very common, and in many towns sober business men freely consult with palmists and clairvoyants. The charge was, of course, a dollar, and the building was packed, while in spite of the diagrams and skeletons he paraded, I had a strong suspicion from the introductory lecture that the professor's knowledge of physiology was strictly limited. The belief received confirmation later when he invited those present to send up any of their

local leaders to have their true characters told. With unusual modesty the latter objected, perhaps because they thought it better that the citizens should not be enlightened, but the crowd insisted and some were forced forward. Now party spirit raised by the railroad question and other matters still ran high, which the phrenologist probably knew, and it seemed to me acted accordingly. Neither did he mince matters at all.

"This man," he said solemnly, after examining the first, "should from his skull conformation have a turn for small trickery, and I do not think I would trust him in business matters."

It was a bold stroke, but it told. There was a roar of delight from those present of the opposite party, and the victim rising purple-faced to protest, only found his words drowned in bursts of laughter. The next it was insinuated possessed the gift of lying, and there was a further clamour of negation and applause, while an incipient free fight broke out at the back of the hall. Whether the third was a liar or thief, or both, we never knew, because

before the professor had finished, a shouting, laughing, struggling mob, clawing at one another, made for the platform. Then Harry said, "Things are looking ugly, and before long they'll break his skeletons up—they're smashing chairs in the back row already. I'm not fond of a mixed-up row, so we'll get out with a whole skin and finish at the opera-house."

Tom was growing excited, and I could see by his face that in another few minutes he would hurl himself into the forefront of the affray, so, sharing Easton's opinion, I coaxed him into the street just as pandemonium seemed unloosed within the building. There followed what the former would have called a glorious row, and subsequently the professor received a hint that Vancouver possessed already too many phrenologists, but I heard that when he departed he took many dollars with him. It was perhaps characteristic that we should have been able to spend three dollars on a night's amusement, but funds were rarely lacking while we worked in Vancouver, and we next proceeded to the opera-house, where a concert was being

held for some charity. The building—and this, too, was remarkable in a town of twenty thousand people—would compare favourably with any in London, while there being no paltry divisions between rank and rank, labourer, mechanic, and merchant sat together.

So we took our places and listened to excellent music. Neither was it strange to find that kind appreciated by the very mixed audience, for there are many men of talent digging water-pipe trenches in Western cities, and, being wiser than the inhabitants of older countries, they are not ashamed of it. At the beginning of the second part a fine, clear voice which it seemed I ought to know, fixed every one's attention with a British ballad. Being jammed behind a column we could not see the singer's face, though Tom also whispered there was something familiar, until a burst of wild applause followed the conclusion. Then he who sang moved forward into the glare of light, and faultlessly attired, smiling back to the enthusiastic audience, we saw the man we had parted with sitting hopeless and ragged by a trail in Caribou.

He must have heard Tom's shout ringing through the rest—for the greater portion of the assembly had been born in the old country, and the song spoke eloquently to them—because he beckoned with his hand. So, in spite of an official's protest—and on the Pacific Slope men are too proud to bribe—we made our way to the dressing-rooms, and found the former pile-driver waiting us with open hands. He would perhaps never be a strong man, but a look of returning health was set upon his face, which was already losing its hollows, while from other details it was evident the lines had fallen to him in pleasant places. He told us his story presently, and it was not an unusual one.

"I came here again soon after you went, when the mine shut down," he said, "and continued another sickening hunt for any work that I could do, until I think we had just five dollars left, and that poor Flora had earned by sewing. Besides, I was badly broken up by too heavy labour. Then I heard the —— scheme wanted a secretary, and having experience of just that kind of thing sent in my testimonials which Flora had kept. Of course I never dare

hope I would get it, for at home unless you happen to be a director or councillor's *protége*, you have not a ghost of a chance, so it took my breath away when I was sent for to meet the Board. They engaged me right off at a fair salary, half as much again as I got at home, and, thank God, I think the struggle is over. My voice is coming back, and since they found out I could sing, even if the —— scheme were given up some one would find me a berth. You must come round and see Flora; she's dying to thank you. That ice-water was certainly killing me, and I can't say how grateful I am."

"Ah, ah!" answered Tom, somewhat irrelevantly. "They do things differently in this country, for as the shovel-gang foreman told the nobleman's son, 'We don't care a little cuss what you are if you can get your work done.'"

Afterwards the other insisted on taking us home, and we found him dwelling in one of the pretty wooden villas, whose carved verandahs and pillars were draped with creepers, while we hardly recognised in the happy,

winsome woman who greeted us the dusty, terrified emigrant girl we had seen in the colonist train. Tom, to his embarrassment, she almost embraced outright, and when he had escaped awkwardly also told us of a weary struggle when she fought off starvation by selling needlework, and was glad to make a curious bargain to repair some mill-workers' clothes. That was perhaps the most pleasant evening I spent in Canada, though when the leave-taking came almost at dawn, and our hostess, with a dimness in her eyes, commenced again to thank Tom for what she called saving her husband's life, he hustled me uncere-moniously down the steps, and did not quite recover until we were half-way home.

In less than another month a cable brought me orders to proceed with all speed to England to go out to Southern waters. So I assembled my few belongings, and gave most of them away, keeping, however, the Marlin rifle, and the same day was escorted by a group of friends to the C.P.R. depôt. There was Tom, of course, and Harry, —— and his wife, and behind them a contingent of wharf assistants,

and never throughout many wanderings did I receive a more kindly farewell, for there is something in the free life of the Pacific Slope which seems to develop the finer traits in a man. So I looked round and counted those whom best I knew, and found all about me whose friendship I had gained on the first journey. The restless tide which sets the adventurous British westward had drifted them to the furthest shore of the Occident—all, that is, save two. Poor Mellard slept beneath the pines in a gorge of the great Gold Range, and Charlie, having fought a losing battle grimly to the end, lay resting at last in a lonely muskeg of far Athabasca. These two had gone under, though through all their hardships they had quitted themselves like men, but I had seen enough in that land to know that neither failure nor success had been wasted, and what in good faith they had started, sooner or later others would finish.

Then the loco whistle rang out across the blue waters of Burrand Inlet, and Tom gripped my hand with a paw like that of a cinnamon bear. Many others were held out, and a shout

followed when he said, "The best of luck go with you wherever you are, and on the other side of the world you won't forget the boys in Vancouver. Besides, if ever you're cleaned out come right back here to us, and there'll be something the matter if we don't fix you up."

Next a conductor thrust me back from the edge of the platform over which the rest seemed intent on dragging me, and with the big bell clanging, the Atlantic express pulled out. So I stood gazing at the smiling faces and group of uplifted hats, until a line of box-cars hid them from my sight, and we rolled on into the forest towards the Fraser valley.

The last I saw of the Pacific province was when, looking back from near Calgary, a wonderful mountain-rampart stretched as far as eye could see from north to south across the prairie, foothills shrouding its lower slopes, and above a dim, ethereal line of eternal snow. Then I realised I had turned down another page of life. In spite of occasional hardships, I had spent happy days in it, and had learned things it is good to know, for there not in fantastic and unlovely ruggedness, but rather

with its natural polish given when all things were made good, I had seen the freer, rawer side of human nature. Real men and not lay figures had moved and toiled round me, and recalling the things they did some were heroes, too. Perfect many in body, highly trained some in mind, stout of heart and strong in limb, I have only grateful memories of the adventurous legion which is steadfastly clearing British Columbia, and desire again to testify lest any should forget, that the ruffian of fiction is a libel and a fantasy. These men do not swagger, and bluff the stranger—I found they were ever ready to help the unfortunate—and instead of uncouth dialect, heard at least better English than is spoken, say, in Lancahsire.

But when there is starvation among untrodden snows to face, a passage to be forced down an ice-packed river, or roads to be underpinned in imminent peril to a two-thousand-feet cañon's side, there you will find the men of the legion grim and reliant, filled, too, with a trace of the old Norse lust of battle, for they are English most of them, neither American nor Canadian,

but English, and—I would say it circumspectly —of a finer growth.

So the great white Rockies faded into the darkening prairie, and the gates of the garden of the Pacific were closed to me. Still at times by a trick of fancy I can breathe the scent of its cedars, see the sunset flushing the white peaks with splendours of unearthly majesty, or look down between the red-barked boughs across great lonely lakes. Then I hope that some time in this life I may pass those gates again.

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